OUR LADY OF DARKNESS

Albert Dorrington
and A. G. Stephens

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"In front of pistols, sword, and locket, Doctor Barradas knelt"

OUR LADY OF DARKNESS

BY

ALBERT DORRINGTON

AND

A. G. STEPHENS

Illustrations by JOHN RAE

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"'And thou,'—turning to the *Mater Tenebrarum,* she said, —'wicked sister, that temptest and hatest, do thou take him from *her.* See that thy sceptre lie heavy on his head. Suffer not woman and her tenderness to sit near him in his darkness. Banish the frailties of hope, wither the relenting of love, scorch the fountain of tears, curse him as only thou canst curse. So shall he be accomplished in the furnace, so shall he see the things that ought not to be seen, sights that are abominable, and secrets that are unutterable.'"

THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

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PROLOGUE

AN AFTERNOON AND A MORNING IN PARIS

PROLOGUE

AN AFTERNOON AND A MORNING IN PARIS

"SOMETHING is about to happen, Imaun; something red—my presentiments are always coloured."

Imaun Pasha laughed; his tawny, ring-burdened fist clacked on the sill of the barouche.

"I should prefer a green presentiment, Calphurnia; I hate reds and browns, they recall——"

He checked himself and looked into his companion's eyes. She was frowning.

"You leave me to guess. Well, do reds and browns recall Plevna, or a milliner's window? There isn't much difference between a dead soldier and a live bonnet. How it rains!"

Lady Calphurnia's mouth smiled, but the glittering eyes held gloom.

"Did you think Plevna would hurt my feelings?" she continued. "Did you think the memory of a few thousand dead Turks or Russians would make me weep? You forget that I was at Alexandria when those brigand war-ships were spitting at us like coffee-pots. A shell burst under my window; limbs scattered, blood rushed. I was not impressed. I told Seymour afterwards that he ought to have been ashamed of himself."

"Did you?" The Pasha looked at her without smiling. "And what did Seymour say?"

Calphurnia smiled again, delicately. "Seymour

didn't say anything. Whoever heard an admiral say anything?"

The carriage splashed round into the Place de l'Etoile. In the distance was the grey hump of the Arc de Triomphe.

"You remind me that I have an engagement. I must leave you for a little time!" The Pasha bent and touched his companion's cheek with his lips. She flung an arm through his.

"Not to-night! not to-night, *chéri!* Ah, you shall not leave me to-night!"

The Pasha glanced at the rain-drenched windows, at the passionate woman beside him, and murmured, "This is an unhappy mood, a mood that will pass!"

Calphurnia's mouth had twisted itself into a thin red wrinkle; Imaun looked at it, and had a sudden spasm of revolt.

"You must not look at me in that way!"

"I was admiring your *coiffure*," he answered listlessly.

"Is that all?" She flung her arms above her head so that the full sweep of her bust might catch his weary eye.

Imaun suppressed a yawn. "I was going to ask you something. May I speak? I have been very good this afternoon."

The mirror above the cushions reflected a tangle of yellow hair, and caught a gleam from the jewelled hilt of a tiny dagger that pinned the wondrous Parisian hat. Her image in the half-light seemed to satisfy her; she lay back smiling. "You are going to ask me something very nasty, because

you are eating your moustaches. Stop, or I won't listen!"

"I was about to ask——" He hesitated.

"Well?" she queried impatiently.

"If you would care for a trip to Australia? Your sheep and mines may interest you more than politics. The air will invigorate you. Will you go? Just for a little, till this trouble is over?"

The Pasha put his question without a gesture.

Her gloved hand crushed his fingers together; her breath was hot upon his cheek. "I will go, *mon chat*, and you shall go with me. I can be very happy with my sheep if Imaun will help me shepherd them. Come with me, dearest, come! I will build you a finer palace than Cleopatra built Antony. Do you know how rich I am?"

With a sudden movement she threw herself to the floor of the carriage, and crouched on her knees before him.

The Pasha held up a protesting hand. "I did not ask that, Calphurnia!"

He lifted her gently to her seat. She frowned and laughed; a solitary tear welled from her painted eyelid.

"Imaun, are you tired of me? Is it because you see a million white women around you? Ha, that is it! In Constantinople I was the one woman amid the flock of shrouded hussies. I was unique, and you never tired. Here I am a victim to competition." She laughed hysterically.

A tiny pucker lined the Pasha's brow. "Hush, my sweet; I merely suggested Australia because you hate Egypt. And I must return there. Trouble is

coming in the Soudan. I cannot take you with me. Go to Australia! I will send for you when the war is over; my word is my word!"

Calphurnia stamped her foot. "I will not return to Australia. Why should I not go to Khartoum? Am I afraid of the empty desert, or your stupid soldiers?" She flung her arms round his neck, and kissed him fiercely. "You must take me with you, Imaun!"

The carriage stopped. Imaun Pasha put his wife from him very gently, and stepped out of the door held by the *hôtel* servant.

"Permit me to leave you; I will return to-morrow. Kiss our little Aimée for me. Has she still the pain in her eyes? Tell her I will bring her some bonbons."

"I will not. You think only of your child now —never of her mother!"

Imaun shrugged his shoulders. "As you please, my dear!"

Calphurnia stood on the glistening pavement for a moment, and the rain drizzled on her powdered cheek. A porter ran down the steps and covered her with an umbrella. As she walked slowly through the entrance she looked back at Imaun, and he thought she seemed twenty years older.

"Good-bye!" His lips scarcely shaped the words. Then he turned and stepped into the carriage.

"To the 'Cercle'!"

The driver worked his horses along the Champs Elysées into the Rue de Rivoli. Imaun closed his eyes; he felt a little weary.

"She will not go back to Australia," he muttered. "She wants to play Cleopatra to my Antony!"

He reflected. For nine years he had permitted himself to be dragged from capital to capital to gratify her insatiable lust for admiration. He had gained her *entrée* to courts and salons, and in return she had insulted his friends, had marred his relations with diplomats. She had even embroiled him with his master the Khedive. Her strange witchery had infatuated him for long; but now—yes! he was weary. He must put her aside and begin again. Her wit might have helped him more than her wealth, but she had misused it. In Cairo she had sneered at Ismail's drawl, in Constantinople she had mimicked Abdul's halting manner until his Highness was the laughing-stock of his own seraglio. Such a wife was pernicious, a menace to his welfare.

"*Diable!*" he muttered. "This must finish! The witch owns my body; my poor soul struggles ceaselessly. Even now—by Allah! when Calphurnia smiles I am drawn to her; even now I am wax in her hands. Was there ever such a woman on earth before?"

She was some years older than he; but at thirty he had sharp lines on his brow, even a grey curl across his temple; while Calphurnia seemed to be more vivacious than when she had fascinated him in Cairo nine years before. Of her past he knew little; she had been a widow; she came from a far country called Australia; he had heard little more. There was one night—he shivered to think of it—when she had murmured to him of strange horrors. She had persuaded him to smoke the opium-pipes that she

had filled, and—had he dreamed it?—she had told him of grotesque ceremonies and oriental rites, of a lover who was a prince and of another more powerful than a king—a lurid phantasmagoria seen across the opium-fumes. And once he had met on the threshold of their house, two Chinamen inquiring for her . . . pah! he would not think of it.

There had been times when she explained her business connections with Sydney and Melbourne. He believed that she owned huge tracts of country in that vague Australia, with here and there a gold mine; a million francs was nothing to her, and she heaped money and gifts upon him. But at that moment he wanted to be as far away from her as it was possible. That also was a mood, perhaps, that would pass with the rain.

The blue-panelled barouche wheeled alongside the kerb and stopped; the Pasha alighted, and with quick steps passed over the greasy pavement to the broad, well-lit portico.

"A thousand pardons, Monsieur!" A rough serge sleeve touched his breast; an arm barred his way.

"*Parbleu!* what do you want?" The Pasha stiffened before a bearded colossus of a man half hid in the shadow of the portico. The man's chest pressed his own; he heard harsh breathing from deep lungs.

"By your yellow skin I know you, Pasha! Where have you been hiding these three years? Do *you* not know *me?*" The voice was slow, sombre; its tones seemed balanced between anger and grief.

Imaun flinched and braced himself against the column. The man's huge bulk threatened to overwhelm him.

"*Ma foi*, I have not forgotten you, Doctor Barradas. Men meet and forget each other quickly; but one glance at you, Monsieur, goes with a man to his grave." Imaun spoke softly; the power of his soothing voice had, in time of danger, held more than one human beast in check. The colossal Barradas had fixed him cunningly in an angle of masonry; he could not move without buffeting the other's heavy body.

Slanting rain beat across the pavement; bent shapes hurried from lamp to lamp; but a sharp eye might have singled out these two rigid forms—courteous seeming, yet alert, and each inwardly raging for the other's life.

Doctor Barradas planted his feet apart; a savage smile parted his lips. "Do you know, Pasha, that I have hunted through Europe to catch you by the heel? Do you know what I would like to do?"

"Scatter my handful of brains against this column! I understand the feeling, Monsieur. Let us think," he continued insolently. "I had almost forgotten the cause of our little estrangement. Was it not about a lady—a *blonde* with blue eyes—a little Englishwoman? Ha! I have it, my dear doctor!" Imaun slapped his thigh. "That woman was your wife. You brought her to Alexandria three years ago. *Parbleu*, Monsieur, I had almost forgotten her!"

"You ran away, Pasha!" Barradas whispered the words; he had locked his hands in the hollow of

his powerful back. "You ran away, Pasha! and hid yourself."

Imaun smiled wickedly. "That is untrue, Monsieur. The man is not a coward who flies a jealous husband to face the spear and bullet of the Mahdi." He straightened his lissom body; his thick moustaches hid his white, sneering lips. "I am a soldier of the Khedive."

"A captain of ladies," said Barradas scornfully. "Where was it that you ran away when the naked desert-men assailed Hicks Pasha and your Egyptian mob? Pah! your breed is not good enough for war, you—you seducer!"

"*Mon Dieu*, I received no medal for absconding with your wife. Let me pass!"

Barradas moved slightly; his chin squared; he controlled himself powerfully. "That is a fine speech to make of a woman who is dead, Pasha. I show you too much honour by offering you a duel; yet I offer it. God sent me out this evening—perhaps He too feels what it is to have an enemy. Come, Pasha! I will not defile this pure column with your brains. Name your friend and the place!"

Imaun lit a cigarette. "Seven to-morrow morning. My friend will be Colonel Laporte, of this club."

"Good, Monsieur! You may tell him to expect a message at midnight." He turned abruptly, and Imaun watched the huge shape tramp across the pavement. A cabman whisked to the kerb and drove it away.

The Pasha was brave, yet his cheek was paler than

usual as he sauntered into the club billiard-room. Two men about town were playing at the far table; that in the centre was engaged by a fierce-eyed Zouave in undress uniform. He looked up at Imaun, blew out his cheeks, stooped, finished his stroke, straightened his shoulders, and then deliberately winked.

"Ha, *mon* Imaun! you are punctual! *Bigre!* give me a soldier for punctuality. I saw you yesterday. What a face she has! How old—fifteen, sixteen? It is the devil that she knows you. I am a friend of the family."

The apple-cheeked veteran banged his cue into the rack and approached the Pasha. Imaun took him aside.

"I have a meeting with Doctor Barradas to-morrow at seven. You must arrange it."

"A meeting with Barradas?" The veteran's cheek paled slightly. "*Bigre!* You must not quarrel with Barradas!"

Imaun leaned over the table, and twisted the red ball into a pocket. "He pushed me, *mon ami;* have you ever been pushed, Henri?"

"*Bigre!* no. But Barradas does not push a fellow for nothing; Jean is the most inoffensive man in Paris. What has happened?"

Imaun clicked the balls absently; he did not look up at his friend. "It is an old affair; he had a wife and I a uniform; that is all. I depend upon you, Henri!"

"But the woman is dead," growled the veteran. "The affair may be settled. Apologise, man! apologise! I will see Jean Barradas. A dead

woman is not worth a bullet. Permit me, dear Pasha, to convey your apologies to Doctor Barradas?"

Imaun's lips parted slightly: he drove the balls kissing against a cushion. "There is no alternative, Henri. I know my man. He has dreamt of me night and day for three years, and now you would deny him satisfaction. I am ashamed of you, Henri."

"It is a bad business!" reiterated the veteran half sullenly. "Last year Barradas cured my little Yvette—she was blind. He touched her—so—with his hands, and she could see in less than a week. I am your man, Imaun, but it is a bad business!"

Meanwhile Jean Barradas was scouring Paris for the friend who would second him on the morrow. He found him in Georges Barbizon, a lean, nervous army surgeon whom he had known since boyhood. The news sent Barbizon home as fast as his cab would go.

Barradas returned to his white stone hospital at Boileau, and entered the surgery where he had gained his reputation as one of the first oculists in Europe. His proceedings were curious. From a drawer he took two pistols, examined them, and left them upon the table. Above the escritoire was a scabbarded sword; he drew it, poised it, and laid it beside the pistols. Opening his shirt, his fingers closed on a locket that held a miniature portrait; he gazed at it for a minute before he placed it beside the sword.

Then, in front of pistols, sword, and locket, Doctor Barradas knelt. His eyes were closed; his lips

moved. When they came at six o'clock he was still kneeling.

An hour later the sparrows in the Bois, fluttering up at the sharp sound of pistol-shots, saw a carriage being driven slowly back to the city.

The carriage stopped at the hotel entrance, and Imaun smiled faintly as the surgeon cursed the driver. The Pasha was very white, but conscious.

As they lifted him out a gust of rain whipped under the covering and drenched his face.

It was nearly eight o'clock.

Slowly, very slowly, they carried him up the wide stairs, and the surgeon congratulated himself that the bandages held so well. "Now, some of these fellows. Ah!"

Imaun was seized with a spasm of coughing. In an instant his mouth was covered with a red stain. The Zouave colonel left the room and swore with grief and rage, cursing the day and the dead woman whose folly had set his two friends by the ears.

A small crowd had gathered in the hotel porch. An undersized officer of cavalry, with a bullet head, slipped forward and touched the colonel's sleeve.

"Ah, Colonel! What is this? *Sapristi!* you must tell a comrade. I was just going home when I saw your party enter. How did it happen?"

Laporte swore under his breath; but the other had shared his tent in Algeria. He stooped hurriedly and whispered.

"It came off in the Bois. Barradas is no shot. *Bigre!* it is scandalous how the military go down

before civilians. And yet—and yet my heart was with Jean."

"Why?" questioned the officer curiously.

"He cured my little Yvette when she was stone blind, Émile. On my honour, she could not see a wall. I took her to Berlin. No use. And Barradas cured her. I cannot forget that."

"But the duel?"

"Ah, the duel, Émile! I was telling you. Imaun was ice. He is a smiling devil when he is out—a cigarette in his left hand, the right ungloved for the pistol. Plevna broke him in: a bullet here and there seasons a man. But the duel! It was raining. The sky was black. Behind Imaun was a trench half full of water and deep as a grave. Ominous, was it not? Jean's face was without blood. Imaun did not meet his eye. That was a bad beginning. Jean stood with his broad face just a little forward, his chin out, so; and his eyes—*ah, Dieu!*—one would say the dead woman looked through them. His back was bent, his fist turned upward—so; it seemed to crush the iron of his pistol. You remember Algeria, Émile; you have seen the hungry lion—waiting, waiting! That is how Jean looked—and Imaun would not meet his eye—Imaun who led his starving cavalry in that charge at Kars. No; he did not balk at a civilian on a wet morning. He was ashamed, that was all. It was over in a few seconds. I was not quick enough to catch him—I expected it would be the other, you see. He fell—near that accursed trench. Ugh! It was more like a grave than ever—half full of water and the rain going *plop, plop, plop* into it from the tree over-

head. I shivered. Jean did not move towards his man. He stood leaning—so! I heard his teeth snap. Imaun is hit badly. Yes, it is a bad business!"

The colonel bowed with sudden stiffness, and ran upstairs. As he entered Imaun's apartment a new fit of coughing shook the figure on the bed. Another surgeon hurried into the room, chattering volubly, comparing the affair with one that had happened near Fontainebleau the morning previous. They hurried here and there; applied restoratives. When they wiped the blood away Imaun's lips were still smiling faintly. His eyes sought his friend's.

"These civilians are the very devil, *mon* Henri! And I who——"

"You must not speak, Pasha!" The colonel thrust a hairy fist into Imaun's open palm.

"It does not matter, Henri. I am done—blotted out! Curse him!"

There was a sudden noise outside. The door flew open as if it had been kicked. Calphurnia entered with feline swiftness. Her dressing-gown clung to her little figure; the wild hair lay like yellow whips about her shoulders. The men watched her curiously. Colonel Laporte stole to the window.

"Oh, *mon prince!* Oh, Imaun!" She flung herself forward; her white face was pressed to the pillow, her fingers groped beneath so that she might hold and shield him with her body. The surgeons drew aside.

"Observe," whispered one scientifically to his colleague, "how she tries to cover him. 'Tis always the same—in the field, in the hospital. The savages

do it, the apes do it. You remember the she-baboon that tried to protect her male when Gruyot shot it?"

Imaun lay very still; his half-closed eyes turned to the leonine head above him.

"I told them to keep you out, Calphurnia," he whispered. "Why——?" His breast laboured painfully. Another fit of coughing shook the red drops from his lips. Calphurnia snatched the napkin from the surgeon's hand fiercely, and pressed it to his mouth. A crimson smear blurred it across the middle.

"Murderers!" she choked. "You are letting him die!"

"Grieved . . . Madame . . . there is nothing to be done. Internal hæmorrhage. H'm!"—one surgeon paced the room, his thumbs locked behind his narrow back; his colleagues looked at the bed and joined him—"it is a bad business."

The colonel's grim head was silhouetted against the pane. A wet white sky was drowning east and west; a few pigeons wheeled above the smoky roofs below; the tick-tick of the ormolu clock was heard above the flutings under the rain-choked eaves.

The surgeons were still whispering, comparing the abnormally vital woman with the half-lifeless form upon the bed.

They gave him a draught; his eyes brightened; his tawny ring-burdened fingers sought the pile of yellow hair that covered his face—dabbled with blood.

"I'm hit badly, sweet one! Jean Barradas—a civilian! Shooting is a lost art—with me. Bar-

radas—a tailor, a doctor! By Allah, I am effaced!"

"Barradas! Barradas!" She rested over him, her hands gripping the blood-drenched sheets.

The ghostly smile lingered on Imaun's face. The pressure of her lips hurt him. He smiled again.

"I was to play king to your queen, Calphurnia! And—a bullet . . . ha! I hate to die in France, and raining too! I shall be tossed into a hole that is full of water. What an end, Calphurnia!"

Her thin fingers were under his neck; her lips were stained with the blood from his mouth. He lapsed into unconsciousness, and woke writhing.

"Those warm sands near the Nile—if I could—ah, you dear gypsy, how your lips hurt! How dark! Is Henri there? Hold tight! I'm falling. Ugh!"

For a minute the cough tortured him, and the red stream gushed from his lips. He fought to his elbow half savagely and brought his right hand to the salute.

"Gentlemen, my love to the Khedive!"

He dropped back as if a hand had pushed him.

The news of the Pasha's death left Paris cold. With few exceptions the papers printed the affair without comment, and within a week the name of Imaun had ceased to arouse even passing interest. Calphurnia had been borne to her hotel in a state of semi-consciousness. Here she lay pressing her eyes as though to knit her thoughts into shape.

For a time she watched the grey dawn light stealing over Paris, heard the innumerable sounds and cries which herald the city's awakening. A convent

bell clanged monotonously, bringing with each stroke the sharp remembrance of Imaun.

As her mind waked the dark shapes receded. The blow had stunned her, had reduced her brilliant faculties to a state of mental collapse bordering on madness. Her return to consciousness was swift enough, too swift for the woman who only saw the bleak edge of life awaiting her. Yet in each slowly returning pulse-beat there was born a new desire to live and meet the man whose bullet had ended Imaun's career.

Day by day she husbanded her returning strength like one eager to gain full play for the stroke to come. And the first weeks of spring found her poised for her task, her mind alert and nimble as pointed steel.

She was not long in discovering the private hospital at Boileau where Doctor Barradas resided. To her it became an object of profound interest demanding constant study and surveillance. At other times she found mental relaxation in visiting the cafés of Montmartre. In one of these places she discovered Antoine Chillon, a native of Gascony. Their friendship was not immediate; Calphurnia was in no hurry for rash acquaintances. She preferred to study him from afar before venturing within his circle.

Chillon was a musician who eked out a few sous each evening by means of his flute. The gift of a few francs awoke him to a sense of immediate servitude. He was ready in a moment to render a Chopin concerto or fly at her bidding to the ends of Paris.

Calphurnia had discovered the man she needed, a quick-footed, oily fellow who wanted a suit of clothes to make him presentable. She made no inquiries into Chillon's past; something warned her that it would not stand the most casual investigation. She was satisfied, however, to accept him as an artiste, a man of quick fancies and movements. There was nothing of the heavy-footed Gascon about Antoine.

Chillon's hour arrived, one evening, about three months after the duel in the Bois. Calphurnia had sent for him unexpectedly, and he stood beaming before her in one of the private rooms at the hotel. From the drawer of a desk she took a cylinder-shaped box which opened at the ends, revealing a tight roll of papers.

"Monsieur Chillon," she began gently, "you know the hospital of Doctor Barradas, at Boileau?"

"It has one hundred windows and fifty doors, Madame." He glanced at the metal box in her hand and smiled.

Calphurnia regarded him thoughtfully. "I shall only ask you to enter by one of them, Monsieur. The passage leading to the rear of the hospital has five windows. You will enter by the second."

Chillon shrugged and moistened his lips. "Madame, I understand. There is a Gronieux safe three feet from the study window. Only one key in the world will fit it."

"They say that you——"

He shrugged again like one accepting a compliment. Calphurnia's eyes grew strangely limpid as

she continued. "Be brief at your work, Monsieur. Your reward shall be great."

"*Merci*, Madame! How great?" he asked naïvely. "I know what this work means." He tapped the cylinder-shaped box grimly. "I shall feel sorry for our friend Barradas when the police raid his house to-morrow at daybreak."

Chillon's head wagged; he was about to roll a cigarette, but the look in her eyes stopped him.

"You are well informed already, Monsieur," she said coldly. "Take care of your tongue. Good night!" Calphurnia followed him to the door, to whisper a few final instructions.

That evening she drove to the Opera House. Returning about midnight, her maid informed her that Monsieur Chillon desired an interview. She found him in her reception-room smoking peacefully near the window.

"So!" Her eyes sought his.

"I found the good doctor not at home, Madame. Since he killed your husband there is no keeping Jean at home. He walks about Paris looking for the ghost, I think. Hein! These duellists are terrible fellows!"

"Go on!" she cried, with suppressed passion. "You found him away from home."

"The police will not, Madame, when they call. The safe was not a Gronieux, after all," he went on with a shrug. "It was a mere iron box that did me no credit to open."

"You opened it?"

"In eight seconds, Madame. I heard people

moving about the house. *Sacre!* they did not hear me though."

Calphurnia took a small bundle of bank notes from a drawer and tossed them across the table. Chillon scanned them hungrily before placing them in his pocket.

"You may want me again, Madame," he suggested from the doorway.

"I think not, Monsieur. Good night!"

After he had gone she turned to her desk and wrote a brief note to the chief of the Paris police. By noon the following day it was reported that Doctor Jean Barradas had been charged with having in his possession the plans of certain fortifications, which had been stolen from the offices of the War Department only a month before.

There were people in Paris who averred that Doctor Barradas was the victim of a shameless conspiracy. As a citizen of the Republic and a member of various scientific bodies, he was held in high repute. By others it was thought that France was passing through a period of military treachery and German espionage. Paris, they declared, was the breeding-ground of revolutionaries and public assassins. Was the well-known Doctor Barradas one of these?

His friends rallied to the Titanic business of upholding his honour. Against them was an array of evidence that bewildered and overwhelmed. The end was not far to see. Each blow at Doctor Barradas was struck with skill and precision. The discovery of certain military plans in his safe was merely the first assault upon his liberty. The final

business of securing the fetters was an affair of wits combined with a vast expenditure of Calphurnia's money.

There was no doubt concerning her ultimate triumph. Jean Barradas was convicted of an offence which branded him for all time in the eyes of his countrymen. Yet even in her hour of triumph Calphurnia remained uneasy while Chillon roamed at large. His sudden drinking habits compelled her attention. His volubility was an eternal menace. The woman who had sent Doctor Barradas to the nickel hells of Noumea found food for thought in the further contemplation of Antoine Chillon.

His arrest on a charge of housebreaking eventuated a few months later. In view of his past career, and in the interests of public safety, the deportation of Antoine was considered necessary.

Antoine was deported.

(TEN YEARS ELAPSE)

PART I

THE CHILD OF CALPHURNIA

CHAPTER I

RELATES WHAT HAPPENED TO A YOUNG GENTLEMAN WHO STROVE TO BETTER HIS FORTUNE

When the French Government transported Jean Barradas across the seas it dealt a severe blow to his son Paul. Justice is blind. Paul had grown up in an atmosphere of candelabra and silver spoons; and when the Republic confiscated the spoons and candelabra, he was left alone with no prospect save a severe term of conscription. He had relatives—Republican relatives—whose political opinions were in deadly opposition to those of his unfortunate father; and to go begging at their doors never entered his mind.

When Isabella Staunton, his aunt, wrote a letter saying how shocked his mother's friends were, and inviting him to live with her in England, he shed boyish tears upon the paper. Lad though he was, he hated leaving France. But there was no alternative. "The son of a spy!" He had heard the epithet more than once, and each time it had cost him sleepless nights of impotent rage. So, with a heavy heart, he took passage to Dover.

To his boy's mind, the occurrences of the past three months seemed like a fearful dream, savagely thrust against his consciousness. That his father, whom all the world revered, should have been ac-

cused of treachery, Royalist though he was, was the first thing incredible. That this incredible thing should have been succeeded by one still more incredible—the finding of plans of Paris in a locked safe in the study, together with a neatly docketed file of correspondence with an official in Germany, proving the blackest treachery—confused Paul to the verge of mania. He was haunted by memories of the court of justice—his father's proud denial; the judge's triumphant sentence. Then—the prisoner hurried away to the other side of the world to herd with convicts; his plea for the last meeting with his son refused. Paul found no answer to the crowding questions that beset him.

He was carried from Dover to the English Midlands like a parcel of goods—a foreign schoolboy with an address-label. In his Aunt Isabella he saw much that recalled warm memories of his mother. In his uncle he beheld a white-faced aristocrat who preserved his game and prosecuted his neighbours. The uncle received Paul without emotion, and looked coldly at his trembling wife as she took the boy in her arms. He had fulfilled his notion of duty to his wife's kindred, but saw no reason to gild his duty with the pretence of affection.

So Paul was sent to school at Shrewsbury, where the boys chaffed him and mimicked his accent. This taught him to clarify his speech and use his fists. He found that a quick left-hand and a cautious right made school-life endurable.

As each holiday term approached he returned to his aunt's house in Warwickshire with increasing reluctance. His aristocratic uncle did not thaw

with the years; his cold reticence was torture to the quick-blooded young Frenchman. The long white dinner table, gleaming with silver and spotless napery, was accessory to the torture. And yet few things were refused Paul. His aunt lavished on him all the love she would have offered to the child denied to herself. She gave him a horse, an Irish hunter; and he rode to the meet at King's Norton. A good-looking stripling of sixteen, he was favourite with many besides fiery Lady Belthorp of Claverton Hall. But in the silence of his own room at Grantham Manor the past rose up to fret him continually. He was French to his finger-tips; and he longed for his own blood, his own life, and shrank from the respectable English vista before him. The years only intensified his sense of his father's utter desolation. No letters had come from Noumea; not a word. Often a dull aching to be near his father seized the son's limbs. He would stare for hours at maps of Polynesia, tracing with a pencil the long sea-route that separated him from New Caledonia.

So the years passed, and Paul was near manhood. There was talk of leaving school, and of the University. Paul loathed the thought. The silent hostility between himself and his aunt's husband had become utter estrangement. They did not speak to each other. Mr. Staunton never interfered with his wife's plans; he never uttered one word that could be construed as an affront to her guest; but his glance was the glance of a master to a dependant, and Paul writhed beneath it. A hundred times he had vowed to run away; and a hundred times love for his aunt, and the fear of hurting her, of seem-

ing ungrateful to her, had restrained him. So at vacation after vacation he returned to eat bread that was choking him.

But there came a day when Mr. Staunton found him in the library, poring again over a map of the South Seas. Paul put it aside and looked up. It seemed to him that his uncle smiled; and the smile was so bitter that Paul's face whitened. That evening he did not come to dinner. His aunt sent servants in quest of him; but the young Frenchman was tramping towards Coventry and the London road.

Paul had vague notions of earning his living as a tutor. He had acquired the habits of an athletic young Englishman; but in his heart he remained somewhat of a dreamer. He had studied fiercely; and in society he had been the friend of every person who played with a pen or pencil. His own literary dabblings had been for the most part confined to his shirt-cuff, though a passionate verse written by a friend adorned the lining of his hat. Paul discovered that the tutor was a myth. It was heard of sometimes in the morning papers, and had been known to commit suicide in the Serpentine; but he never saw it for certain. Paul became a clerk, his clothes and manners gaining him a position denied to two hundred less attractive applicants; and for his first year in London he starved genteelly on thirty-five pounds a year. Then one word of flame to a tyrannical employer sent him shelterless into the world again.

In the second month of a starvation no longer genteel, Paul found it necessary to pawn his gold

chain—his watch had vanished already. He had written to his aunt once, to thank her and tell her he was well; it never occurred to him to write again for assistance. So he hoped, fought, and despaired —a waif in London.

CHAPTER II

TELLS OF AN ESCAPE FROM THE SEVENTH CIRCLE OF ASHES

By the end of a year Paul had passed through a series of descending curves that landed him amongst the damned souls of the Thames riverside. He haunted the docks to find rest for his aching body; and the score of coloured races that chatter on the quays filled his mind with strange longings for a sight of the East. Here were the green-hulled leviathans that nodded to the giant bergs of the southern seas; here the huddled gypsies that loafed about three oceans, year in and year out, and their sister tramps that scoured a hundred coasts. The lower decks of some of these still reeked of Asia; and if perchance you dropped into the little trade-rooms you might face some grisly trophy of Java or Borneo, a jewelled kris that had belonged to an Orang Kaya, or a sun-bleached skull taken by Dyak head-hunters.

Paul felt his brain fired by an inspiration, and spent a shilling on pen and paper and a place to write in. While he wrote he starved, for the shilling had dropped suddenly from Heaven; and miracles do not happen every day. Inspirations are as rare; and Paul easily decided to follow his and starve. Starving was a commonplace.

Next day he walked to Fleet Street and entered

the office of a new and marvellous weekly paper, which he had heard spoken of as more brilliant and less conventional than the rest. He begged permission to see the editor, and was admitted without a glance at his wretched clothes. The editor prided himself that some of the paper's most valued contributors were men of shreds and patches.

"Well," said the editor without turning, "what's the trouble?" He stretched out a pair of strong hands, tore a dozen notes into halves and tossed them into a waste-basket; after which he seemed greatly relieved and chuckled audibly.

"I want employment," said Paul tremulously.

The editor looked puzzled, distressed.

"Are you a machinist, comp, or devil?"

"I am a writer," answered Paul modestly. "Romance." He put it with exceeding brevity.

"Ha!" The editor pounced on some sheets of foolscap that were covered with verses; then he stretched his legs under the desk and wagged his head. 'Imperial Ode by John Smith!' Ha! He chuckled again, while his remarkable hands scattered it in fifty pieces towards the gaping basket. "Smith's improving, though," he said, looking hard at the bits. Rhymes *dawn* with *morn*. Talented dog!"

"I have a sea-story here," said Paul, unbuttoning his coat.

The editor shook his head, and pointed to a pile of matter in a pigeon-hole. "There's a dozen yarns by well-known writers. I'm afraid I can't touch your sea-story; but if you care to submit a political article we'll—we'll look at it."

Paul hinted that British politics were beyond him, but his story was a very short story, and might . . .

He stopped suddenly and edged to the door. The editor looked at his pinched face, put a shilling on the corner of the desk, and told him to read up London sights or the lives of the domestic animals of the aristocracy—something that the public yearned for. The sea was well enough in its way, but it had been utterly overdone. Then his powerful hands made a sweep at an open manuscript before him, and his loud chuckling was heard above the thunder of the machines.

. . . . . .

Paul was no longer proud. He accepted the rebuff and the shilling, and returned to the riverside. He was so recklessly hungry that he spent the whole miracle, and fed gloriously upon something that was called meat. When he left the dingy eating-house, he had decided to go in quest of a fellow-countryman whom he had once helped. The fellow-countryman had reported himself as likely to dispose of a picture to a second-hand dealer for half a sovereign, if the good God were favourable.

The rain flogged the earth into swimming strips of mud; bridge-lamps glowed along the unending pavements; afar down the river a liner shone through the gloom like a factory, and somewhere in the fog a tin whistle accompanied a querulous hymn. Here and there a shape flitted under the sodden trees; lean necks and round necks peeped from the queer angles of shadow, whenever the echoing pavements presaged the coming of a man. Paul halted

under the lee of the parapet and crouched from the stinging rain. A sailor-man of uncertain paces rolled forward to regain the elusive coping, and stamped up a shower of mud. Paul stretched out his hand to steady him, and the sailor-man wept tears of gratitude. He was a Dane, blue-eyed and limbed like a tree; his beard spilled big drops over his chest. He gripped Paul's hand and wept anew.

"Go back to your ship!" said the young Frenchman, "or the police may gather you in."

The Dane beat the parapet with his fist and pointed to the glowing leviathan down in the pool. "Dot is mein ship—der *Murrumbidgee;* you come abord! I haf insulted you, mein vrendt; come to mein cabin und have a drink mit Sorensen."

He seized the half-willing Frenchman, and they jogged forward through crowds of shouting labourers, bales of goods, and steaming dray-horses. The Dane tumbled into a wherry, and in a few minutes they had gained the liner's deck.

Sorensen clattered below, holding Paul in a fierce grip of friendship, until they reached the bowels of the ship. The Dane kicked open a small door.

"You come und drink mit Sorensen. You hear me?" he shouted hoarsely.

Paul staggered into the dark cabin, groping blindly with both hands. The pleasant warmth of the place suggested the neighbourhood of the engine-room; moreover, the deep pulsing of her machinery hinted that the *Murrumbidgee* was unleashing for the sea. Paul struck a match and lit the swinging lamp under the beam. The Dane had flung himself into a lower bunk, and lay breathing heavily.

Paul sat quite still, until the bustle and clamour overhead had almost ceased. The thundering in the shoots and the "Hool-yah, hai!" of the Lascars became less frequent. A Scotch voice was heard all over the engine-room, and the fretting engines throbbed with a deeper note.

Paul's memory went back to the cold streets and the rain that lashed and stung like ice-needles. This refuge was so warm and snug. The night and the wharves suddenly frightened him, and his brain swam in the shelter of the cabin. Overhead a bell was clanging furiously; he started to the door, but returned stealthily and sat still. Surely some one would come down presently and hunt him out. The Dane stirred at the last stroke of the bell, and rolled over, snoring furiously. He looked so big and generous that Paul wondered if his huge bulk contained one small reproach.

"Any one for the shore?" A harsh voice trumpeted the words through the alley-way.

Paul crept to the door, locked it, and put out the light. There was another bunk above the Dane's; he slipped in and covered himself with a pair of blankets. A heavy footstep approached and passed into the next cabin. Then Paul remembered suddenly that the *Murrumbidgee* was bound for Australia, and the thought sent the young blood vaulting through his body. He yearned for a map of the unknown; he longed to trace with his fingers every indentation, cape, and inlet that mark the coast-line of the wonderful continent. Around it were coral-strewn islands where never man had left a footprint on the surf-bound beaches, where drows-

ing gulls hung above the trade-lashed palms or cried from the sea-smoke. There would be new cities twinkling in fern-laden hollows, hills, and gullies where the brown-limbed men laboured on every ridge, in every hollow, winning yellow gold from the reefs.

He lay back in the bunk and dozed fitfully.

And Australia was close to New Caledonia. Paul cherished the hope that sooner or later he might aid his father to escape. How—he did not know; but his inmost thought turned always to that end.

The panting tug had left the *Murrumbidgee* somewhere in the darkness of the river. The steady tramp of her engines and the sudden lifting motion told him that they were beating the open waters of the Channel. He reached for the port-window and drew it back; a sheet of spray slapped him on the neck and face. Through the clearing fog he caught the flare of a distant light: an Ostend wheel-boat tore past, snoring boisterously and driving the white rime over her bulkhead lights. The keen air whipped his face pleasantly—heavenly whips indeed, after the reeking pavements that steamed with the filth of centuries. A peal of laughter reached him from the saloon; the tinkle of a piano followed, and a dim far-away voice lisped, "The Gallants of England." Somewhere behind him came the unmistakable purr of a dynamo, bringing thoughts of caged animals and giant cats. He dozed again and slept till he was wakened by a terrific thumping at the door.

"Below there! Sorensen, ahoy!"

The Dane leaped from his bunk at the words and hurried on deck. Paul sat up and glanced through the port-hole; a grey horizon faced him, with a fleeting line of wind-blown manes tossing on the near seas. Dun clouds drifted across the east; a cold blast cut through the port and stung his cheeks anew. He covered himself up and awaited the inevitable. One by one the flushings deepened in the sky; amber welled to saffron, and saffron to living gold, until the melody of colour reached its key-note in the sun.

The cook in the galley lifted his voice in querulous song. Some one said he was singing because he would see the Southern Cross once more; another said he sang every time he left his wife. The cook denied both statements, and hinted that the chief steward had just presented him with a bottle of beer.

. . . . .

A soft footfall approached the door. A tow-headed, sleepy-eyed steward looked in casually and blinked feebly.

"Good-morning!" said Paul, with a sick frost-feeling inside him.

The steward felt his hair abstractedly, while a large smile wandered over his face. "You ain't a passenger," he said.

"No," answered Paul.

"You ain't a sailor," he went on with horrible brevity. "You ain't a steward, engineer, or fireman. Now what are you doing in Sorensen's cabin? Eh, what are you a-doing of?"

"Nothing," said Paul simply. "What will they

do to me, do you think?" He put his question like a drowning man.

The steward felt his chin while his brain went in search of the caustic epigram.

Paul sat up. "I came aboard last night with a friend, and the truth of it is, I forgot to go ashore when the bell rang."

"That's a pity, a dreadful pity!" grinned the steward, "because our skipper won't put back for you—anyhow, I'll go and see. You'd better come up too—there's six more gentlemen mustered aft who overslept themselves. You're the seventh; seven's the puffick number. Oh, Lord, you'll get hell! It's Clinch's watch. Come on!"

Paul stumbled out and followed him on deck. A few passengers promenaded up and down: he glanced round fearfully and saw half a dozen ragged stowaways standing near the rail. A short-legged officer with a complexion of ginger-bread was reviewing the pathetic six.

"By God, I'll make you fellows stand up to the music! I'll sailorise you! Down you go into the stoke-hole, every rat of you!" He turned sharply and hailed a passing engineer. "Mr. McAndrew, will you see that these fellows are put into watches below? My compliments to your second, and kindly tell him to give 'em beans."

His eye fell on Paul; he recoiled in pretended astonishment. "Halloa! my white-faced son of a countess, is it you? Surely there's some mistake," he added facetiously. "Steward! haven't you made a mistake?"

"No, sir; he came aboard to see a friend and fell

asleep in Mr. Sorensen's cabin." The steward felt his hair like a man who had done something for the ship. Paul dropped his head.

"You're a nice fellow, you are!" The officer's voice was full of caustic reproach. "What'll become of your mother the countess and the poor old earl? Aren't you ashamed of yourself, leaving the dear old castle to come gallivanting on a common Australian liner?"

Paul was dimly conscious of a small crowd that had collected near the funnel-stays, watching the situation with keen relish. He inwardly cursed his semi-aristocratic appearance, which the mate's sharp eye had noted instantly, despite Paul's worn slop clothes.

"I'll see that your luggage is berthed aft," went on the officer; he too observed the crowd, and his official chest expanded. "I'll see that you are berthed in the saloon with your equals." He leaned forward mysteriously, his hand spread over his ear.

"What name did you say; I didn't quite catch it?"

"Paul Barradas!—and for God's sake cut it short!" whispered the young Frenchman.

"Lord Barradas!" shouted the officer, waving his hand and ignoring the pathetic appeal. "Lord Barradas, ladies and gentlemen!"

Paul observed a bird-like face peering at him through a monocle. The face stole nearer, and for a moment the crowd turned to view a curious little woman who leaned heavily upon a gold-headed crutch. Her face was almost parrot-like in its ex-

pression; the blanched hair over the lean temples was drawn in a half-circle down to the prominent cheek-bones. The monocle went up to her eye and fixed itself on Paul.

"Barradas, eh?" Her voice was sharp and strident.

The short-legged officer raised his cap; his manner changed from the light burlesque to utter obsequiousness. "Barradas, he says, my lady; but I have a notion that it's Wilkins or Jones."

"Jones is a Welsh name," she snapped, "and this young man is evidently French. Barradas! Barradas!"

Her monocle dropped into her hand. She glanced at Paul with watery blue eyes that seemed to hold a query.

"Strange!" she murmured. "Well, I war not with—are you a relative of the celebrated Doctor Barradas?" she continued abruptly and aloud.

Paul blushed painfully, and execrated himself for blushing. "His son, madam!" he answered.

"Take a sailor's word, madam," interrupted the mate brusquely, "his name is either Wilkins or Jones. If it happens to be Jones, he'll feed the ducks—Jones is my stepmother's name, and I'll be lenient on her account."

The monocle went up again. She swung round and levelled her crutch. "Please reserve your quips for your deck-scrapers. I will see Captain Clark about this young man. He speaks truly; I know. Ah!"

She purred a little, and her lips curled sneeringly. The crowd fell back as she shook her crutch at the

gaping officer. "You will see that he is properly berthed and attended. I will speak to the captain."

She hobbled away leaning on her crutch, and the monocle dangled over her shrunken breast. The officer scratched his head and stared vacantly at Paul, at his boots, his frayed clothes, and then up at the streamer fluttering at the masthead. The crowd drew aside in small groups to discuss the situation.

"Come now!"—the officer put a finger in Paul's buttonhole—"ain't it Wilkins? Mind, it's between ourselves this time! Tell the truth, and I'm your friend—now, isn't it Jones or Wilkins?"

"It's Barradas!" said Paul with a sigh of relief. "You gave me a fair guying, old man. One would think that the company employed you to knife stowaways with your tongue!"

"There you are," said the officer, throwing out his hands despairingly. "If it hadn't been for the guying I gave you, my lady wouldn't have chipped in, and you'd have been amongst the ashes or feeding the ducks now. That bit of pantomime was your salvation."

Paul saw the truth of his remarks and smiled. "Who is she?" he asked.

The short-legged officer produced a plug of tobacco and bit a large piece off the corner. "Who is she? I'll tell you, my yellow-back hero, so that you won't forget it. In the first place, she occupies a good half of this ship, or near it. Ten state-rooms knocked into one, she has; partitions taken down; partitions put up; her own furniture and fittings; her own servants—and a nice beast one of

them is—a pet Chinaman, if you please, uglier than a lop-sided collier. The captain on his bended knees; and a letter every day from the chairman of the company to keep him there—so that he daren't get off if he wanted to."

"Phew!" whistled Paul as the dumpy officer spat indignantly over the starboard bulwark.

"In the second place, you couldn't run a wheelbarrow through Australia without trespassing on her estates. Her sheep and cattle would feed London for a year. She could buy this liner, and the fleet that it belongs to, and the company that owns it. That's who she is. Her name is Lady Royal, but she's known about the world as Lady de Quincey."

"Why Lady de Quincey?"

"Because she's an opium-eater—and I reckon she's seen you somewhere in her dreams, or she'd have let you rot in Sheol before stretching out a finger to save you. Your luck may stop here or it may not. De Quincey is like Nature—she never repeats herself."

"The Lord knows why she helped me!" said Paul; "but I'm grateful, all the same, because she saved me from you."

"Thanks," murmured the officer. "I'll forgive you the remark." He turned away and looked back with a grin. "Your career on this boat will be watched with interest. Keep sweet with De Q.!—she's seen you in her dreams throwing kisses over the Bridge of Sighs. Depend upon it, you'll come out all right in the last chapter!"

He waved his hand in a fatherly manner, and

plodded off; but turned with a mysterious hand raised. "P. S.—the daughter!" he whispered hoarsely. "Apple of mother's eye! An angel! Trust Peter Clinch's eye for a woman!" He disappeared along the alley-way.

The tow-headed steward, who had been watching proceedings with a lively interest, gravitated alongside the young Frenchman, exhibiting a contrite air. "If you'd like a wash, sir, I'll show you the bathroom."

"The very thing!" muttered Paul. He followed the steward below into a luxurious lavatory. The short-legged officer looked in breathlessly. "You haven't any luggage, my lord, have you?"

"Don't!" said Paul grimly. "Don't put that question to a man who has one collar for the voyage round the world. By the way, may I ask your name?"

The short-legged officer sat on the edge of the bath and eyed the taps with great severity. "My name's Peter Clinch—a humble shellback that's as much at sea on this hooker as you are. I stand for the nasty but necessary seamanship; the other officers supply the haw! tone and the manners. Look here! Clinch is feeling sorry for you. The purser tells me that De Quincey has paid your passage-money first saloon. You can't go to the table in these filthy togs." He kicked Paul's garments contemptuously into a corner of the bathroom.

"Of course I can't," said Paul bitterly; "and I'm half-starved too; I've been living on fried sprats and potatoes for the last three months."

"I'll see you through," grunted Clinch. "You're

a good-looking chap; and I suppose you're well educated and all that. You look fit to play Mephistopheles through twenty chapters of good society. I'll pull you through; and if old De Quincey sticks you in her will, don't forget Peter Clinch!"

He darted out and flew upstairs. Paul's spirits rose as he kicked aside his old clothes and plunged into the water. Clinch returned and found him towelling himself from head to heel.

"I've fixed you up," he said breathlessly. "There's a young swell chap signed on as steward—he's broken-hearted—girl threw him over for a guardsman—and he doesn't want his clothes. Real broken-hearted he is—won't comb his hair or wash himself. Says he'll be happy if he's allowed to go about in a pair of sail-cloth pants all the rest of his life. I never saw a chap part so freely with his things. Here they are, and you're welcome!"

He threw down a bundle and looked smilingly at the young Frenchman. "My word, you're a good-looking chap—it would have been a pity to waste you on the ducks!"

Paul towelled himself briskly and swung his arms to and fro. "Do you think we'll have a good voyage?" he asked, slipping joyfully into the soft serge, and relishing for the first time in months the touch of silken hose.

Clinch shook his head. "You'll get it fine all the way out except when I'm on watch, and then it comes up dirty. Smith and Furlong get decent weather—everything plain and smooth—but immediately I show my nose on the bridge, up it comes dirty as a scow and down go the ladies below. I've

changed my watch to dodge it; but the weather beats me every time."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Paul buttoned a well-cut coat.

Clinch smacked him on the shoulder genially. "You'll do! And if De Quincey don't get mashed and set you up in business, I'm a lawyer. Shall I call you Duke or Lionel?"

"Don't be a lunatic," growled Paul. "There is the breakfast bell, and I'm a wolf. Glad I've got the chance to thank you!"

CHAPTER III

CONTAINS SOME NEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE WAY OF A YOUNG MAN WITH A MAID

Paul loafed into the saloon for breakfast, fighting the wolf inside him. He was claimed immediately by the tow-headed steward, and bowed to a chair. Paul fingered the menu carelessly.

"What'll you 'ave, sir?" The steward breathed down his collar pleasantly, and wiped a speck from a neat serviette.

"Ham and eggs," murmured the young Frenchman dreamily. "Ham and eggs, and quickly." He lay back and closed his eyes. It seemed a decade since he had tasted real food; and here were blue china cups steaming with the coffee of Araby—tiny silver jugs that dropped cream into the quaking fragrance.

His lips moved as if in prayer, and the bald-headed gentleman opposite nodded approvingly and addressed him.

"Sir," he began in an unctuous voice, "I am indeed delighted to meet a person who does not forget to utter his thanks to a beneficent Providence."

"Don't mention it!" murmured the young Frenchman absently.

"Some people," continued the elderly gentleman, "forget that a mere plank separates them from Doomsday. They make no sign, no evidence of

grace, nothing but an exhibition of idolatry of their stomachs!"

"Stow that, Pole!" whispered an obese red man, who was attacking a large grilled steak with great energy. "I prayed this morning very early."

"You have never prayed in your life," replied Mr. Pole gently. "You wouldn't pray to anything save food; you don't believe in anything but food. Food is your vile deity."

"Your humour tempers your theology," hissed the fat man. "But you mustn't go on in that dreadful way, Pole. I'll sing a hymn with you after breakfast, not before."

"His mouth is full of meat," whispered Pole, "and he defies the Truth with both hands."

Paul lounged upstairs at peace with the world. Peter Clinch was watching for him.

"Is anything wrong?" inquired Paul.

Clinch whistled a few bars of a song, and permitted his gaze to wander up and down the other's waistcoat.

"Well?" said Paul shortly.

"Oh, nothing," responded Clinch. "Thought I'd like a glimpse of you after your meal. I've seen men drop dead after a good feed." He raised a hollowed hand to his mouth with a semblance of mystery. "Don't eat the ship's sausages!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Anything else?"

Clinch scratched his ear reflectively and sighed. "I had to circulate a few reports about you this morning."

"About me? What do you mean?"

"Easy there! Easy does it. The thing had to be done. Don't you remember the crowd that saw you brought up for judgment? D'ye think they're likely to forget the circumstance? Not much. They'd have made the trip pretty lively—tabooed you and all that—because you were a stowaway dependent upon De Quincey's charity."

"Go on, please!" said Paul impatiently. "How did you circulate the reports, and what were they?"

Clinch spat over the rail judiciously. "I said that the whole business was a put-up job—that you were a real swell, fond of a lark; and that you wanted to play a joke on De Quincey, who is a relative of yours."

Paul winced. "How could you circulate a story of that kind?"

Clinch caught his arm and pointed to a hatchet-faced young lady who was in deep conversation with Mr. Pole. "I told it to her as a great secret." And Clinch walked away smiling.

Paul moved towards the saloon aimlessly. One or two women eyed him with interest. He glanced through a near window and observed the bird-like face of Lady Royal, peering over a paper. He entered the saloon nervously and coughed. Up went the monocle, and down went the Frenchman's heart into his boots.

"I wish to thank you," he stammered, "for your kindness," and stopped irresolutely.

She stared at him vacantly, as if he were a tiny spot on the far horizon.

"To thank you," he reiterated, and paused to consider the painful manner in which the blue vein was pulsing on her lean temple.

She felt for her crutch as a pantheress feels for the limb of a tree. "What do you want?" she lisped. "Haven't they fed you properly? I see you have washed yourself. There is no occasion to attack me with your thanks, Barradas! Ha! Ten years! Ten years!"

Her nostrils dilated painfully; a feline sneer crossed her lips, as if she were about to mew. Paul quaked inwardly, and would have retreated.

"Why do people annoy me?" she whined; "people who are more coarsely fibred than blacksmiths or cattle. They tread like elephants or crawl like snakes." She reached forward suddenly and made a stiletto-cut with her fan. "For God's sake, Barradas, don't stand gibbering there! I am thanked; oh, indeed, I am!"

She grabbed her crutch and made for the blue velvet hangings at the saloon-end. "If you have a grievance against the ship's officers, you may speak to my daughter!"

"Daughter?" gasped Paul.

"It should have been son, do you hear?" She rapped the table with her crutch. "Son! son! son! To aid me! Yet do I need aid?" she muttered. "Better daughter—to console me! Yes, better daughter!"

She stopped at a couch and fell back lisping. Paul backed to the door stealthily, intending to make as little noise as possible. He could understand the feelings of this opium-laden creature, the

acute agony that every jarring sound must cause her; and he commenced a gently sliding exit.

She sat up. "I don't think you have a sense of humour, Barradas!"

"I am sorry, my lady," he said humbly. "I'm afraid nothing remains to me but a keen sense of pathos."

"Come here!" she cried sharply.

He approached her delicately, with a noiseless tread.

"Do you know that your uncle was the most accomplished scoundrel in Europe? That was one of the things I found out while I was searching, searching when——" She paused abruptly.

"Do you mean my Uncle Louis?" cried Paul. "It was he who left his money to build a church."

"Ah!" She crouched over. "A church to help his soul!" Her laugh sounded like a cracked gong. "A cairn of stones and a fat priest to mumble over the tin gods. A church! Surely a hundred cathedrals would not help a soul that is damned like his! Do you know," she cried, "I saw him last night?"

"He has been dead some time," murmured Paul. Then, in a desperate effort to meet her humour: "I hope you found him well?"

She fixed him with her monocle and leered. "I am speaking of his soul. I saw it floating in the whirlwind, and such a tiny soul it was!"

"How small was it?" He suppressed a grin.

"Your uncle's soul was hard to see," she lisped; "it was like an undersized pea floating through the infinite. I borrowed a miscroscope from Richelieu and observed it closely!"

"The soul?"

"Yes, it was singing to Queen Anne, and the Queen threw it burning kisses across the red clinkers. Anne has a larger soul than Cæsar, and Cæsar's is larger than Villon's. Marat and Robespierre are small-souled men. But your Uncle Louis has the tiniest in the Pit."

She lay back with her eyelids screwed over the pupils, her flat bosom lifting with the pain of many thoughts. A young lady entered almost noiselessly, and placed a heap of papers on the table, then sighed wearily and glanced at the shivering woman on the couch.

"I am going to look over Barcroft Downs papers, mother," she said, without looking at Paul.

The woman of millions nodded. "Do not weary yourself, my darling!"

"I should not mind if Tonson would learn simple addition. I can't make anything of his figures."

Paul would have retreated, but Lady Royal turned upon him suddenly. "This is my daughter Aimée—Mr. Barradas. I think you had better shake hands. It will be—it will be one of Fate's ironies." She chuckled noiselessly.

The girl looked up, smiling vaguely as he bent forward. "I saved him from the Pit," cackled her mother. "The sailors were going to bury him in the seventh circle of ashes. I wish he could tell me why I did it!"

The young Frenchman choked back reply. Aimée's soft grey eyes swam upon him; the ruddy meshes of her hair were brindling with gold. She

held out her hand; the hot blood rushed in her cheeks.

"Please don't mind what my mother says!" Her lips barely shaped the words.

"I was about to go on deck," he stammered.

Miss Royal made a swift gesture, and somehow he backed from the saloon and up the stairs. He glanced down curiously and saw her gliding up after him.

"Mother has been scolding you, Mr. Barradas? Please don't think about it; she doesn't mean half the things she says. She has been very unhappy."

"Of course she does not," he said quickly. "If it had not been for her generosity I should really have been mixing ashes."

The grey eyes wavered before his. "I never heard about it; will you tell me?"

"About my stowing away? Certainly." And he related in a dozen clear sentences what had happened in the early morning. He told her also how he had tramped through London, eating with the sullen North Sea haddockers on the Thames. Then came the story of his wanderings—his walk from Warwickshire to London. Of France he said nothing.

Aimée Royal sighed and fixed the sheaf of papers on a small table that had been placed in a sheltered nook.

"You speak English very well indeed," she said; "and you are French, are you not?"

"Yes," said Paul in French, "but my mother was English. She first taught me; and I have been

educated in England. In the last two years of roughing it my tongue has perfected itself."

"You have only the slightest accent," said Aimée; "and I will not criticise it," she added brightly, "because people say I have an accent myself. We lived a long time in Paris; and even now mother often prefers to speak French rather than English, though English is her native tongue. She was born in Australia, as I was."

Paul wondered a little at the girl's simplicity in telling this to a mere stranger; it puzzled him how such a daughter could have grown near such a mother.

"Your name seems familiar to me, Mr. Barradas; but I cannot think how or when I heard it; it seems like a vague childish memory. You will succeed in Australia," said Aimée with conviction. "But you must give up tramping!"

"I'd sooner take to the sea than beat the pavements again! And yet," he said earnestly, "there is a spirit of camaraderie in Bohemia that makes the keen edge of poverty almost endurable. The charity of the poor to the poor is infinite."

Aimée nodded and frowned by turns. Her dimpled hands were full of documents. She held them up and sighed. "Even I have to justify my existence—by auditing Mr. Tonson. Mamma says that I will be such a rich woman that I must learn how not to be robbed. And just now I have such bad eyes that I find figures very trying."

Paul wished to express sympathy; but did not venture. Instead, he asked, "Who is Mr. Tonson?"

"One of our employees," said Aimée. "He manages our largest station in Queensland. His accounts are problems; he is the genius of figures."

"Manages a station? Does Lady Royal own a railway?"

Aimée laid down her pencil, laughing gently. "Oh, dear, no! An Australian station is what the Americans would term a ranche. We grow wool and hides and tallow," she said.

"I suppose it requires a large estate for that business?" He looked at her simply.

"Yes, indeed. Do you know, you could put London and Paris in the middle of one of our stations and get lost trying to find them. You could, truly," she said, noticing the twitch of his lips. "Tell me the area of London and Paris, and I'll show you how many square miles Barcroft Downs covers. Why, men have ridden out after breakfast and have perished between the boundaries. We've got the Never Never at the back of us."

"Is the Never Never a river?"

"No, it's the undefined country beyond the outside tracks. The Bogan poets put it in their bottom lines," she said, smiling. "Are you a poet, Mr. Barradas?"

He felt that the grey eyes were quizzing him, and he laughed. "Poetry is an undefined country for me at present. Yet sometimes the Sea wakes my pulse and sets my heart into a *lub-a-dub*—and then I think I can breathe poetry."

"I don't understand." She leaned towards him, puzzled and interested.

He sat down beside her, and spoke in French.

"I was on the beach near Marseilles once, when a boy. It was perfectly dark and windless, and the tide was full of sounds like the rustle of trees. A brazier was flaring at the pier-end, and showed me a line of surf-drowned reef beyond, and a woman leaning over the net-covered rail of the pier. She was calling to some one across the water, and the echo of her voice beat back from the great sea-wall. A bell answered her from the wastes—just a tinkle! tinkle!—half heard above the wash of the tide. It was the woman's son; he had been out in a trawl for three days, and the bell was his home-coming signal. There had been a terrible storm all along the coast, and I suppose that tinkle of his was pretty music to the mother. I saw her face as she crouched under the dusky flare; the look in it impressed me." He laughed and stood up. "And that's the biggest thrill I ever received. I mustn't forget to tell you that I was pretty hungry at the time; I had walked a long way, and was supposed to be lost. So you will have to judge whether it was poetry or hunger."

Aimée folded some papers carefully. "What happened afterwards?"

"Some country sausage," he said seriously, "from a peasant's wife. It was sweet, too!"

"I didn't mean that." Her eyes sought his again. "What happened to the woman on the pier?"

"I have no idea. I suppose the man came home with his load of fish or whatever the sea had sent. Probably he was intoxicated that night; possibly he beat her."

Aimée sighed and buried herself in the papers.

Clinch passed them, beaming from his large mouth to the roof of his head. Paul clenched his fists and made a slight movement.

"What is the matter?" she asked carelessly.

"He smiled!" said Paul.

Aimée made a stab at some refractory figures. "Who smiled?"

"One of the idiot officers. He's kept it up ever since I came aboard; it's like a river."

Aimée was about to speak, but rose suddenly. Paul turned, and saw a servant, a tall, dark-faced girl, with sad eyes, and lips that moved soundlessly.

"Pardon me, Mr. Barradas; my mother wants me. I fear she is not well."

He caught a glimpse of a pathetic smile; and she was gone.

Paul awoke to see Clinch approaching him jovially. "Well?" queried the officer with a fo'c'sle leer that showed dark avenues of broken yellow teeth.

"Go to the devil!" said Paul.

CHAPTER IV

IS RELEVANT TO TAMERLANE THE DWARF WITH SOME IRRELEVANCIES

Two slippered feet moved the painted screens asunder; a head, a bristling Mongol face, peeped over the outstretched wing of a stork. It was a peculiar head, wide at top and smooth as a bone. Between the enormous shoulders hung a pigtail that whipped the carpet every time the squat body swaggered across the room. This was Tamerlane the dwarf, who kept the lamp that lit the pipe that Calphurnia smoked, who lived in the heaven that opium built.

Tamerlane stood on his slippered toes, took a bronze lamp from a niche in the wainscot, and trimmed the black wick. A match fizzed between his fingers; the opium-lamp glowed like a carbuncle. Tamerlane blinked, holding it to the level of his eye, and stared at the sleeper on the ebony divan.

Ten years had changed Calphurnia from a butterfly to a beetle. The drug had warped her lissom body and built little heaps of flesh under her eyes. The indrawn lips revealed the edges of her set teeth; the large blue vein throbbed across her temple.

In Imaun's time she had flitted through Europe, out-dazzling the beauties of many embassies; going from court to court, eating the bread of queens and

paying for it in her currency of brilliant chatter. Since the Pasha's death she had fallen from the heavens, and lay spluttering.

In a life with Imaun there was a field of possibilities so infinite that she had dreamed of a kingdom. Her wealth, allied with his military genius, might have given her empire in Egypt. She had dreamed and dreamed until a man named Barradas lifted his arm and shattered her world with a pistol-ball.

Her hands were locked over her breast; her breath came and went noisily. The purple hangings behind the stork shivered softly; the tall girl-mute slipped past the brooding dwarf and glanced at the white-lipped sleeper. She turned her black, intelligent face, and held up a finger in sign of, "Shall I wake her?"

Tamerlane bared his tusks genially. The white pongee silk about the ebony shoulders appealed with savage art to his Mongolian eye.

"Wake her not, or she will scratch thee! The pain of thirst will do it soon enough. Bring coffee and set it here." The girl drew the drapings together and vanished.

Suddenly Calphurnia's fingers crooked inwards upon her naked flesh; the locked jaws relaxed. She was awakening.

Tamerlane crouched back fearfully and settled his huge limbs behind the white-winged stork. His eyes sought a curious pyramidal shape which filled one side of the large room. A velvet pall draped it from end to end, and each fold was pinned by tiny silver-bladed daggers.

It was a calm day, and hardly a sound broke the aching silence. The noises of the ship were shut out by heavy doors and many curtains. Even her motion through the waves seemed stilled in that dense quiet.

Calphurnia fought herself into an upright position against the pillows and tossed back the wisps of iron-grey hair that stole into her eyes.

Tamerlane ventured out and drew aside the velvet pall, revealing a miniature yacht about twelve feet long, perfectly modelled and proportioned. The hull was polished oak; a small mast rose from the glass deck, and from the crosstrees hung a dozen carbon globes. Deep in the hold was a golden couch, half hid in dyed Nile rushes. On the couch lay the embalmed body of Imaun Pasha. His tawny face stood out clear against the rushes; the grey hands were clasped across his breast, and the jewelled knuckles radiated yokes of flame above his lifeless body.

Tamerlane retreated, filled with a deeper religious awe than was ever begotten of his brazen Joss.

The mute returned and deposited her tray on an ivory table supported by four perfect tusks. As she opened the inner door, athwart the curtains came, almost imperceptibly, the fluting notes of an organ that ended in the tramping melodies of Tannhäuser. She went out, and all again was silence.

Calphurnia sighed, and drank her coffee in famished gulps.

Tamerlane's enormous head was bowed to the carpet. At first she could not discern his black-robed figure against the dark bearskin rug; only

the yellow head was visible, the smooth head and the slug-like eyes. She laughed until her white lips cracked painfully.

"Get up, my Tam!" She leaned over as the salaaming body recovered itself, and laughed again. Then she flung herself on the divan and struck her slippered heel on his neck. "What a head thou hast, my Tam! The bulls in the field must envy thee!"

The kneeling dwarf trembled; his tremendous shoulders humped and shook with joy. He caught the tiny slipper in his fist and kissed it. She frowned; her pale-blue eyes searched him closely. "Thou hast a knife in thy sleeve again!"

A glint of steel showed amongst the lace of his dark clothing. He spread out his open palm and wriggled.

"Why?" she asked again sharply. "Canst thou not attend me without arming thyself like a butcher?"

"I keep it for myself and the Devil." His wide palms gripped his thighs. "The Devil who robbed thee of Imaun."

Calphurnia looked pleased and rested her foot on his shoulder.

"Thou hast a head and a heart, my Tam; but that knife is not needed—it is not needed." She reached forward and clutched the rail that guarded Imaun's sepulchre. "I have paid my debt in my own fashion. Sharp knives are made for cattle and soldiers; put thine away!"

Tamerlane swung upright with a jerk of his long arms; his curved knife was out hacking the air.

"Some day thou wilt permit to give him two strokes, my queen—*sh!* one for the right eye—*sh!* one for the left. Ho! I hear him howling in the dark."

Calphurnia stamped her foot.

"Put away that knife, thou Tartar, and begone!"

She stole around the strange coffin, her lips moving with pain at each step. The glass deck shone under the steady glow of the carbons in the cross-trees. Imaun's placid features contrasted strangely with the haggard vulpine face of the woman above him. The gold rail around the coffin-ship was scratched and cut in a hundred places, where her jewelled fingers had locked themselves in moments of agony.

Calphurnia went back to her divan and sipped coffee. Tamerlane eyed her from the background, rubbing his sides with an ape-like movement of the hand. Years before in China she had stumbled across his bristling form; he was the butt of his tribe—a limping, ferocious clown. His ugliness bewitched her; the sight of his moving ears comforted her beyond words. The fascinating Tamerlane was bought, and became Calphurnia's slave and worshipper.

At first sight of Imaun's sepulchre he had filled the apartment with peals of Tartar laughter. Straight upon the echoes came Calphurnia with a brass-handled knout, and chastened his unholy mirth to whimpers of regret. The power of that lean arm astonished him; when she slept he would touch with his lips the grey sleeve that covered it.

Hitherto a fat arm had been his only symbol of force, but when he rubbed his wealed shoulders and recalled her grip, he became filled with a mighty respect for the Things that are Lean.

There were times when this stooping, grey-haired woman terrified him; there were times when she vaulted the gold rail and fought a Devil named Barradas. Such a fight it was—peasant and bear, Tartar and Tartar! Tamerlane would squat on a velvet cushion and watch. Calphurnia always began by calling the Devil evil names, taunting him with killing the good Imaun until the Devil became angry. Then the fight began. Calphurnia would grip the invisible Devil's throat, swearing like a wild cat and rending him until he was dead for that day. But he always returned, and a new battle was fought over the Pasha's coffin, until the dwarf hated the Devil Barradas with the hate of a savage.

Calphurnia finished her coffee and stretched out her thin arms. "What day is this, my Tam?"

She watched the word shaping on his lips, and sighed. The curtain moved; a white shape flitted down the corridor and stole across to the heavy-draped divan. Calphurnia looked up and smiled.

"Aimée, beloved one!"

She lisped the words softly, as if afraid of the ominous croak in her voice.

The girl knelt and kissed her. "Are you better to-day, my mother?"

She stroked the shut hand on the divan, and looked up into the livid face.

"Hush, dear! I am very well. Do you think I am sick because I sleep out the garish day?"

The girl drew nearer; the hot-lipped woman bent and embraced her; the dwarf turned his slug-like eyes towards them for a moment, and dozed under the lee of the stork.

"Come on deck, mother! Come away from this close room. Come and see my birds, and the flowers I bought at Malta!"

Calphurnia's eyes held all the fondness that remained in that dead soul.

"Ay, I will come and see your flowers. Buy flowers, Aimée, and make them your bed. When you were a baby, my sweet—he, and you, and I went far, far away to a place where I would lie with you in deep hollows of sun-dried leaves. How sweet it seems now! It was long ago in China, and all the pretty mandarins came to see us. Some of them drowned my baby in scarlet hibiscus and cloves. Ah, I have lived!—or have I only dreamed?"

"Why do you sleep so much, mother? It is such a beautiful day on deck. Would not the sweet air do you good?"

"Hush, child! When I sleep I am with your father. In dreams we traverse again all the lands we loved in his life. And waking, I love to look at him. The stars cannot show you anything so fine as that dead face. His feet are as small as your hand, Aimée. There was a day when his eyes shamed these."

She clacked the diamonds on her fingers against the ebony. The girl looked at the starry flames above the knuckle and then into her mother's face.

She touched a bell; the mute girl came and held aside the hangings behind the couch, bowing humbly. Calphurnia moved to the inner room leaning on her daughter's arm. Half an hour later they passed up the saloon stairs into the sunshine.

Paul had grown weary of watching the saloon stairs, and had walked forward to have a chat with some second-class passengers. When he returned he saw Aimée standing on the bridge beside the captain. The captain's back was turned to Paul, but he could note by Aimée's face that she was eagerly listening to his remarks. He seized a deck-chair, seated himself with some elaboration, and lit a cigar, which he smoked furiously.

"She has left him for the captain," said a young lady near the saloon stair. "He was talking to Miss Scarf."

The mother of the young lady nodded. "Yes, he is smoking a cigar now; presently he will grow angry with it and throw it overboard."

"I am sorry for him," continued the daughter.

The mother shook her head. "She will not marry the captain, child. She has money: she will marry a man with money—as much as she has; which is proper. This young Barradas is poor, I am sure—a mere dependant on Lady Royal's charity. Miss Aimée will marry a bank director, a man well past middle life, a man who knows money. What do young people know of the value of money?"

Paul fought his cigar as though it were a resisting Hercules. Aimée's hand on the rail was quite close to the captain's.

"Beastly cigar! Clinch might have kept it." He threw it overboard.

"I told you so," commented the watcher near the stairs. "Now he is telling himself that he will never speak to her again. And she is watching him over the captain's shoulder. Your father used to say that money is the tallest thing in the world, child; he said that lots of big people break their necks trying to shake hands with it. Yes, she is looking at him over the captain's shoulder."

"She hasn't seen me yet," growled Paul to himself, glancing furtively up at the bridge. "What the devil prompts a man to neglect his duty to talk to a girl?"

A few minutes later Aimée prepared to descend from the bridge. The ship was rolling slightly; Aimée swayed; the captain steadied her, holding her arms with religious care. She smiled tenderly as she reached the deck.

Paul permitted his hat to tilt slightly over his nose. He assumed a careful pose in the deck-chair. Aimée approached, and paused quite close to him to look over the rail.

"You don't seem happy, Mr. Barradas," she said teasingly. "I am afraid that the cooking on board the *Murrumbidgee* isn't what it should be."

She smiled; Paul found her smile irresistible. He rose at once; already his ill-temper was going.

"I saw you on the bridge with the captain, Miss Royal." Paul strove to match her humour. "Are you aware that I once knew a captain who lost his ship and all hands through talking to a young lady? Not a soul was saved!"

"But our captain is a very careful man—so jolly, too! Don't you think so?" She glanced up at the bridge.

Paul's ill-temper returned. "I'm afraid I can't agree with you, Miss Royal!"

"Now you're cross, Mr. Barradas! So please smoke at once, or I shall run away. Where is your cigar?"

Paul hesitated. "I——"

Aimée's blithe laugh rang out. "You threw it overboard! I saw you! And you told me Mr. Clinch gave it you! For shame, Mr. Barradas, to be angry with—with a poor little cigar!"

She waved her hand merrily, and tripped to her mother's chair. Paul stooped far over the rail and made one intense monosyllabic remark to a passing foam-fleck.

The mother of the young lady by the saloon stairs croaked exultantly. "I told you so!"

CHAPTER V

DEALS WITH THE HUMOURS OF TWO TOGETHER; AND THE PATHOS OF ONE ALONE

The *Murrumbidgee's* long cable of smoke was streaking the air of the Indian Ocean. Paul had been ashore at Port Said, with Clinch at his elbow to pilot him through the hideous snares of the town. Clinch was careful to warn him against unnecessary luxuries—the heathen with the bric-à-brac, the unprincipled ruffians with the donkeys, and, above all, the army of sirens recruited from all the islands of the world. Paul would feel for the solitary sixpence in his pocket and swear that nothing earthly could tempt him to break a single commandment.

Throughout the voyage Clinch watched over him with jealous care, filling the ship with rumours of his colossal inheritance, his eccentricities. To more than one inquiring friend he related how Paul Barradas had wandered about Europe disguised as a beggar; how he had mingled with the denizens of Houndsditch and Seven Dials.

One day Aimée handed Paul a sheaf of accounts, with a playful remark that he might fritter away the weary hours by unravelling some of Tonson's figures. Paul pocketed the papers and retreated to an obscure corner of the ship. It took him twenty minutes to discover that there was something more

than lunacy at the bottom of Tonson's weird book-keeping. He carefully placed the accounts on Aimée's table, and sought her on deck.

"Am I disturbing you, Miss Royal?"

"No; I was only pretending to read; the page is all blurred to-day: it is one of my bad days. But you seem disturbed, Mr. Barradas. What is it?" She smiled at him.

"Tell me something about Tonson first." He sat beside her with his hands across his knee.

"There isn't much to tell, except that he came to us about four years ago, with excellent credentials. I have only met him twice."

"Why did you give me those papers, Miss Royal?"

"Simply because I couldn't make anything out of them."

Paul produced a memorandum from his pocket. "His accounts show a deficit for last year; but it appears that he has improved the estate with tanks and fencing. He does not give details of the improvements. The sum of five thousand pounds is put down to loss of stock. Are your affairs audited by professional men?"

"Oh, yes, we have our lawyer people in Sydney and Brisbane. But Barcroft Downs is my hobby, and I'm supposed to keep things straight. I'm afraid my head isn't big enough."

"Should you not visit Barcroft Downs and see for yourself?"

"I'll ask my mother to send you," said Aimée, laughing. "She would not let me leave her. We have built another yacht, and I think from what

mother says that we are going to cruise about the Islands this winter. I think she would like you to go to Barcroft Downs. But would you care to go? If it's a liberty, of course I'm only joking."

"Of course it is no liberty, Miss Royal; I am badly in need of employment. But Lady Royal might easily choose some one more competent," he said deprecatingly; "my knowledge of cattle has been gained chiefly from a few cows that followed the milkmaid home at evening when I was a boy in the country."

"You would soon learn what to do," said Aimée earnestly. "Some of the best stations in Australia are managed by strangers. Anyhow, it's my station and I can please myself. That is, if you would like to go."

"Miss Royal, your mother has already befriended me without reason, and it seems hardly fair. Some other would suffer—Mr. Tonson, for instance."

"Oh, I don't want to oust Tonson. This is simply a matter of business." She turned her book over and over, and frowned slightly.

Paul stooped to pick up her fallen book, but his eyes were moist and his heart knocking at his ribs. The door of independence was opening to him at last—not the counting-house door, that led to the heated office with its line of stools, its regiment of anæmic clerks, but the door through which he would pass to the warm plains and stamping herds. So vivid had been Aimée's descriptions that he saw the scene clearly. How good it would be to have the stalwart men of the backblocks for companions; to see the yellow sun lift from the deep red of the

desert! In that moment he pitied London and Paris, with their endless streets and their prowling, fear-haunted men and women. Oh, it was a princely offer indeed! The grey wheel of horizon heaved before his swimming eyes . . . he became conscious that Aimée was looking at him anxiously.

"Are you ill, Mr. Barradas?"

"It was a momentary vertigo. I beg your pardon!" He straightened his shoulders. "I thank you for your kind offer, Miss Royal. I thank you, indeed."

He passed under the saloon windows, steadying himself against the woodwork. Aimée watched him thoughtfully, perhaps tenderly.

A wisp of moon heralded the quick tropic night, and died away over the distant floor of the sea. Strange filmy vapours crept around the sky, and the south wind piled reef upon reef of clouds into great banks, leaving a rift of clearness all along the east. As Aimée looked, it seemed to her that the heavens were crossed with a river of stars.

A skinny hand touched her shoulder; she turned and shrank from the lean-bodied woman standing beside her.

"You frightened me!" cried Aimée. "What do you want, please?"

The woman bared her uneven teeth and folded her arms. "You never attend our prayer meetings, Miss Royal. I have been sent to ask you to come to our next."

"I will try," said Aimée, moving away to the opposite seat, while the punkahs whined and seemed

to adjust themselves to the slow beat of the engines.

"My name is Miss Scarf." The woman followed her stealthily.

"Indeed," said Aimée, without enthusiasm.

"My friend Mr. Pole is anxious that you should join us in prayer."

"Mr. Pole is the gentleman with the long hair, I presume," said Aimée coldly.

"Oh, no! Mr. Pole is slightly bald. He doesn't like to see you speaking so frequently with the young French gentleman. The French are very sinful, he says."

Aimée's chin was lifted a little; she stood very erect. Miss Scarf flinched from the threatening grey eyes.

"Mr. Pole objects—and he sends you to tell me?"

"Talking with French gentlemen is very sinful," pleaded Miss Scarf, clasping her hands. "The devil comes in pleasant guises. There is a book which tells us that Satan is a Frenchman."

"Perhaps you would like to convert Mr. Barradas?" said Aimée.

"He is an evil man, I am sure." Miss Scarf looked up at the sky and crossed her hands. "I should consider it my duty to sit and pray with Mr. Barradas. You are too voluptuous," she whispered.

Aimée faced her, shrieking with laughter. "Oh, you silly girl! Aren't you drifting from prayer? You are stoning me too soon."

"Mr. Pole says you . . ."

But Aimée had slipped among the chairs and ran laughing along the deck.

Clinch passed her, and found Paul immersed in blissful thoughts. Clinch smiled comprehensively, and sat beside him.

"I never saw a chap get on like you," he began. "But things might have been different if there had been a few young bloods aboard—young swells that would have made the running pretty hot. There's been no competition, and you've had it all your own way." Clinch dropped his chin into the palm of his hand despondently. "Nobody's had a chance of seeing you on your mettle. Suppose an English duke had been aboard—a clean-cut fellow, say, with any amount of clothes and his father's sword in his box."

"Suppose there had been?" said Paul dryly.

Clinch scratched his head. "He'd have made up to Miss Royal, and you'd have fought a duel in the middle watch. As things are it's only a one-man ship—there's no interest. All the women dog you, and I've had to stop more than one little billet-doux from getting into your hands."

"You destroyed letters addressed to me?" thundered Paul.

Clinch approached him soothingly. "It had to be done, and I did it. Some of those middle-aged cats are dangerous—full up to the brooch with tricks and experience." Clinch sighed. "And I wasn't going to have you spoiled with giddy petticoats."

"I am eternally obliged to you," said Paul, "for guarding me from the shoals."

Clinch stood up. "They're shoals right enough, and every Barkis of 'em willin'. Give 'em a wide berth and no winks, and you'll pull through."

"You tried to pull me through when I was brought on deck that first morning. Own up, didn't you mock me for all you were worth?"

"There you go!" Clinch smote the rail with his clenched fist. "When I first saw you troop up that alley-way, with your head down and your knees knocking, I says to myself, this is the man that's ridden in the hunting-field and danced with fair women. Couldn't you see it in every hint I threw out? Couldn't you see how it fetched De Quincey?"

Paul coughed and lit one of Clinch's cigars without further reproof. Queer shapes lay huddled in canvas chairs. A half-caught whisper fell to an inaudible mumble as Clinch passed along to the bridge. One loud-voiced American was heard all along the suffocating decks; small groups of men spoke of the heat-fear that held the ship. The cry of a child came up from the stifling cabins, and a half-dressed woman ran screaming along the passage for a doctor. Silence again, broken by the reeving punkahs and the monotonous *tramp-tramp* of the engines. A steamer's lights burned clear on the far horizon. The roof of wind-steered clouds had vanished in the west, and from the *Murrumbidgee's* keel came a white phosphorescence that smeared the velvet floor of the sea. All around the ship a myriad stars wavered. Paul looked down agape, marvelling that the face of heaven should be so clearly mirrored in the ocean. Almost imperceptibly the notes

of an organ stole into the silence, and suddenly from the lower octaves swept the opening chords of Gounod's "Faust." He wondered vaguely if the unseen player were Miss Royal. The chattering along the deck ceased, and even the turbaned lascars paused stealthily as the pealing chords filled the sweltering hollow of the ship. Then the player, acting under some strange impulse, touched the keys with a brief prelude and drifted into one of Mozart's melodies. Paul shivered under a sudden breath of wind. The music ceased, and again the whining punkahs filled the night.

A white shape came towards him, with a single diamond lighting its shadowy hair. The *kiss-kiss* of silk made him look up. He gazed at the dimpled hand on the rail beside him.

"The women and babes are all below, and the heat is fearful!" said Aimée.

Paul murmured commonplace assent, and looked at her admiringly. The faint breeze shook the masses of hair about her loose gown. There was an odour of mignonette, as if the wind had touched some newly-gathered flowers.

She glanced at him over her shoulder and smiled faintly. "I will exchange thoughts with you," she said.

"I could only offer a sword for your roses—for I was thinking of war. Music stirs the fighting emotion in me."

"A sword!" Her lips parted. "There are so many in the world; and they are all bared from the scabbard. One is bound to feel their points sooner or later."

He looked into her face; her lips trembled. "But you have never felt the sword?"

"I grieve sometimes," she answered simply. "My mother is so strange; and her illnesses terrify me."

Paul did not speak; she looked at him earnestly, as if plumbing him, weighing him, making up her mind to some resolution.

"Did you ever see my mother's state-room?" she asked suddenly.

"I never had the opportunity, Miss Royal," he replied, trying to cheer her. "The door is always guarded by an army of Asiatics who sleep on the threshold of the sacred temple. But one can imagine its oriental magnificence."

"An army!" she said reproachfully. "There is only Tam. I am in rather a reckless mood tonight, I think. Come, and—and I will show you."

He followed her to where a smell of burning incense filled a passage; and the electric sparks glowed dully under shades of amethyst and purple. Aimée slid along the panelled sides and lifted a heavy screen of silk, disclosing an oblong room littered with Eastern curios: a brazen Joss grinned from his shrine; at his foot squatted a silver ape on a velvet mat. A heap of gorgeous draperies was gathered about a divan; Calphurnia lay huddled in the folds. Aimée drew them aside gently, and Paul beheld the tortured lineaments of the sleeper—the shrunken, gaping jaws, the poor thin hands locked together. Every line in the seared face bore the pain of a hundred years.

"Oh, Miss Royal!" Paul stepped back, his hand uplifted to blot the picture out.

A blue-hilted dagger pinned a leaf of paper to the little lacquer table beside the sleeper. Aimée plucked it out and poised it in mid-air.

"A present from Sumatra!" She made a cunning up-and-down stroke and laughed tragically. "It lay for two days in the throat of a princess. Let's read the note. My mother keeps a diary of her dreams. Listen!"

She held the paper near the light to whisper out the message of the scrawl. "The drug from China is inferior," she read. "The scenario of my dreams moves too quickly; the atmosphere I breathe is coarser than earth's. My sweet-voiced spirit-people are crystallising into gross satyrs; their touches are painful; they scream at me from rolling clouds of smoke. Last night a viscid monster gripped me by the throat and dragged me to his ocean cave. . . . I used to dance through Paradise with my lover, and the music of heaven filled the spheres."

Aimée's voice suddenly broke in a sob; she stole back to the canopy and drew the folds together. Paul retreated. The pungent odours of the East buffeted his brain. Aimée stretched out her arms and rocked forward suddenly. He caught her quickly.

"Oh! Oh!" she laughed hysterically. And "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Paul was inexpressibly moved. He took the cold hands and stroked them softly; he spoke soothing words; gradually the colour came back to her cheeks.

"It was not right of me to bring you here," she said. "I do not know why I did it; but you have been so kind, and I so need a strong friend sometimes. Will you forgive me my mad impulses?"

She looked at him with swimming eyes. Paul crushed back an impulse to fold her in his arms, and, lifting her fingers to his lips, kissed them gently.

Afterwards, in the silence of her state-room, the touch of his lips came back to Aimée. She wondered why she had taken him to where her mother lay in bondage. For a moment the red shame dyed her throat and face.

"And yet, what does it matter?" she cried half fiercely. "He is the only living creature who will not laugh at her or me. And I am so lonely! Oh, God, I am so lonely!"

CHAPTER VI

COMPLETES A VOYAGE, AND THE FIRST PART OF THE STORY

"Give me coffee, Aimée, quickly!" Calphurnia crawled over the mats, her thin lips held together with the mucus of thirst. The blanched hair hung in ghostly wisps about her lean temples, the veins in her throat pulsed feebly; every gesture carried with it the after-shocks of the drug. She clutched the edge of the tray greedily, her lips sought the rich brown fluid—opium's antidote. The girl stood near, sick with apprehension and fear.

"More coffee, Aimée!—more coffee! I have just crossed a desert of red, red sand that burned my naked feet. My face is raw with the fires of the sun. I wanted to reach the Nile, the sheltering trees. The pyramids are shadowless, and the dead centuries gave up their murdered kings and queens to hunt me across Egypt. I could not reach the Nile; yet some mirage of it haunted the east—herons flew in great flocks across the brazen sky—the floor of the desert quaked with the thunder of the far-off cataracts. Antony struck me with a stone; and fought with Cleopatra for my body; I could not reach the Nile—I could not—I could not!"

"It was only a dream," murmured the girl sooth-

ingly. "Give up the horrible drug, mother! and you will not be haunted by these Antonys and Cleopatras!"

Calphurnia's hands went to her knees; she crouched forward and gripped her flesh savagely. "Ah, Aimée! opium gives the soul a holiday from its rude tenement, and it wanders through all the systems of the universe. Do you know, the souls are already whispering that space is crowded with vagrants, and the oldest spirits are flocking to the other spheres!"

Calphurnia struggled to her elbow, breathing heavily.

"Give me some clothes, dear! I am freezing! Every draught cuts me like a wind from the Pole." She wrapped herself in a fur robe and huddled into the far corner of the divan. Her teeth chattered in that sultry atmosphere, her fingers clutched the girl's warm hands and held them as a child might.

"What day is it, dear?"

"It is Sunday." The speaker's lips trembled. "We have been five weeks at sea."

Calphurnia rubbed her hands against her daughter's softly; she seemed grateful for the warmth. "Let's think, dear. We are going to Brisbane; then I must leave you a while. The *Imaun* is waiting for us at Adelaide. Did I dream of a boy named Barradas—Paul Barradas?"

The girl flushed. "No, mother; he is on this ship. I should like to speak of him."

Calphurnia blinked feebly and fumbled for her monocle.

"Give him a thousand pounds and let him go.

He will come back when it is spent. I wonder why I helped him! It was wrong. One should kill the young serpents with the old ones."

"He would not accept money," said Aimée quickly. "But we might find him something to do at Barcroft Downs. He might assist Tonson."

Calphurnia looked at her queerly. "So you are interested in him, and would help him more. Is Fate's finger in this? Sometimes I tire of aping Fate. Do as you wish and we will see what comes. Send him to Barcroft Downs. I mistrust Tonson!" Calphurnia's voice grew suddenly harsh. The instinct of business lit her face with a momentary flush. "Send up Barradas to look after him! I will not be robbed! Send Barradas up, and let me hear his reports weekly. Give me a drink, dear!" She dropped back exhausted.

The girl rubbed a gong, and ordered more coffee. Her head was dizzy; the silver ape had begun to spin round in hideous contortions, the velvet floor rocked. She groped out and staggered on deck into the pure air. It was almost dark. A fairy glow of Japanese lanterns lit up the open spaces; a line of flags had sprung from bridge to stern-rail. The *Murrumbidgee* had rounded the Leeuwin, and was due at Adelaide next day. Aimée sighed enviously at the eager girls who circled the white deck, shouting the news of the last dance. Then she stepped back quietly; an angle of light revealed Miss Scarf's eager face, shadowed by Paul's clear silhouette. He was looking weary, his chin dropped to his hand. Miss Scarf had pitched her voice in a strident key.

"We are at our journey's end, and instead of kneeling in thanksgiving prayer, they are about to indulge in sensuous music; and men and women who hardly know one another will be clasped in a wicked embrace."

"It is to be hoped that the equality of the embrace will not be strained," said Paul, remembering his Shakespeare lessons; "or your good Heaven may be indignant."

"You are irreverent to-night, Mr. Barradas," sighed Miss Scarf, "quite too irreverent."

Paul looked at her viciously; his temper began to rise.

"I would dance with a fence if it were polite and nicely frilled, Miss Scarf; but I would never be so irreverent as to dance with you!"

"Oh, Mr. Barradas!"

"My remarks are a study in the expression of emotions." Paul waved a dignified hand. "They are confined to things of wood, things devoid of spiritual emotion; such as picket fences and——" He checked himself. "Your religion is the enemy of my good manners, Miss Scarf!"

"I do not understand," gasped Miss Scarf.

"Yet I am never obscure," said Paul, rising as he saw Aimée; "never!"

Miss Scarf smiled faintly. "Are you going?"

"I must," he said politely; "I must truly leave you."

"Have you been quarrelling?" asked Aimée, summoning a smile as he came up. "I'm afraid Miss Scarf will never make a convert of you."

"This steamer appears to be run for the benefit

of Miss Scarf and Mr. Pole," said Paul confidentially. "They attack me separately; they keep watch and watch like the officers. I cannot speak of Mr. Pole without a strong emotion; and Miss Scarf's methods of conversation are beyond my intelligence. At this moment I feel like asking Clinch to give me back my old clothes and a bucket of ashes for a bed. This long sea makes one feel solitary."

"Do you know that I have settled your future?" said Aimée, smiling. "You are going, as we say, 'out back,' among the gums and kangaroos. There will be no unending sea to annoy you; so you can wish Madame la Mer good-bye."

"God forbid!" he exclaimed fervently, "that I should not look upon her again. Hide me in the mountains of despair, behind your Never Never; drive me to the ends of your uttermost station, and she will bring me back. Look at her! Look at her!" The edge of his face was towards the girl; she saw the light in his eyes, the quick blood swim in his cheek as he pointed seaward.

A sullen roof of cloud hung like a cowl over the rim of the moon; the clear levels of grey deepened to an ebon shade; a faint blackness rose along the eastern horizon, and the sea whitened into sudden foam. The *Murrumbidgee* lay over, nuzzling the woolly seas like a giant in a bath.

Clinch's voice rang out. "Better face the music while you have a chance, ladies and gentlemen; I guessed there would be dirty weather as soon as I stepped on the bridge."

An unseen band crashed instantly. There was a

hurrying of feet, a swishing of silk; a score of satin shoes went kissing along the smooth planks to the beat of the waltz. The captain glittered up from the saloon, his jewelled fingers sought his tawny moustaches as he nodded briefly here and there. He approached Aimée.

"May I have the honour, Miss Royal?"

Paul smothered a soft oath and looked into her eyes. Her hand touched his instinctively.

"Mr. Barradas has claimed me," she said laughingly.

"God bless you for that!" whispered Paul, and swung her gracefully down the blundering rows of dancers.

The captain felt his chin reflectively as he mounted the bridge. "Oh, you stowaway!" he muttered, "to whisk a couple of millions from under my very nose. Gad! What superb shoulders she will have by and by! I hope the southerly will wet him through and through; I'm sure he hasn't a change of clothes."

A soft chuckle at his elbow brought him to the half-turn: it was only Clinch, and he passed on.

The leaping spray lashed the awning on the weather side: the first crack of the southerly very soon deepened into the booming of great sea-guns.

"You will get wet!" gasped Aimée, as they slid from the wrath of a white-topped breaker.

"My mistress would not drench her own!" he smiled. There was a crash, and a faint scream went along the deck. "Miss Scarf!" he laughed; "how the Sea must hate her: I'm sure she will send up

her ambassadors to catch Mr. Pole one of these days."

"Who are the Sea's ambassadors?"

"The gentle shark and the domestic whale. I have made several sketches of Pole delivering a sermon to a company of torpid whales."

"I envy you your excellent spirits." Aimée dropped into a chair, with a flash of memory.

"Ah, Miss Royal!" he whispered; "they are a mere ruse to avoid the pursuit of Sorrow."

"But you are going to work and be happy," she said. "You are entering a new country and there will be new faces, new trees and new flowers: you must love Australia, because she is brave and young, and her children stretch out their hands to the voyager from the North. Do you know that I have been quite feverish since we touched Albany? It is the smell of the earth; the sweet fragrance of my native land: it goes to my head like wine. I'm sure you'll love our country—the most beautiful country in the world! Indeed you will be very happy."

"I will try," he said, smiling. "But do you leave the ship to-morrow?"

Aimée sighed. "Yes. We shall go on to Brisbane in our yacht. Some of our people will meet you there."

The faint drumming of a gong reached them. She started up.

"That's mother! I must go. I may not see you again here. We shall be off very early to-morrow."

She stood apart from him, peering down the stairs, as if to catch her mother's voice.

"Good-bye, Mr. Barradas." She held out her

hand. "I hope you will be happier in our new land. I wish you well, indeed, and—I hope to see you again soon."

"Good-bye, Miss Royal, you have been very good to a poor wanderer." His breast laboured painfully. "Good-bye!"

She stopped at the stair-head and turned again. "I'm glad I gave you that last dance before the storm. Look at your mistress now!"

His eye followed the jewelled finger that indicated the white, storm-flecked seas; and when he turned she had gone.

PART II

THE CHILD OF JEAN BARRADAS

CHAPTER I

SENDS THE READER CLATTERING ALONG AN AUSTRALIAN COACH-TRACK

"Say, Billy, have yer put that French cove's luggage in the boot—the fellow that's booked for Jackeroo Downs?"

A towzled head bobbed over the counter and dropped back again. "Yer couldn't get his traps inter the coach, Jim; yer'll have to send for 'em in a bullock dray, 'n' then you'll only be able ter shift his boots 'n' his collars."

Jim swore in the doorway of the booking-office and dragged out a huge leather trunk. On its side was painted

PAUL BARRADAS,
BARCROFT DOWNS.

Jim eyed the address scornfully, and pitched the trunk into the boot of the coach.

"S'pose I'd better take somethin' belongin' ter him for fear he might want ter change his necktie. Anythin' else, Billy?" He jerked his head around the doorpost and breathed heavily.

"Naw."

Billy lit a cigarette, lounged to the footpath, and permitted his eyes to wander over the brick-red

coach and four bay horses standing in various attitudes of dejection.

"Remember me to Miss Maloney, Jim, 'n' tell her that I'll struggle over to her dance on the fifteenth."

"Yer won't go, surely?" Jim took the reins from a boy and spat over the near wheel.

"Maloney's is a cow of a hole ter dance in," said Billy; "but I'll have ter show up. I'm thinkin' of rafflin' a horse I found, 'n' Maloney's partial ter raffles. S'long, Jim."

Billy leaned against the office and waved a hand as the coach cracked over the stones to the hotel.

Paul was waiting under the verandah impatiently. The animal curiosity of the people cut him like whips. Strange, lean-bodied men hung agape at every movement, criticising his foreign appearance in the drastic idioms of the bush. The shape of his hat was discussed freely for half an hour. The words "toff," "spieler," "jackeroo," were mouthed in the interim of many beers.

Several leading citizens came out of their stores when the coach rattled up to the "Shearer's Arms." Mine host rushed at Paul in a red heat of obesity, and shook hands. A brown giant to whom he had once nodded loafed across and shook hands also. "Ta-ta," he whispered confidentially. "Maloney has a pub at Lag's Point; yous'll stop there a bit and change. His she-oak's only middling; so keep your neck clean!"

Three more strangers came up in the same casual manner and shook hands. Each of them told him secretly that the coach would stop at Maloney's;

each of them referred to Maloney as a ginger-headed cow. Paul climbed to the box-seat without a sigh of regret, and sat still while the publican addressed a few whispered words to the driver.

"There's three chaps coming from the Downs, Jim; d'ye hear?"

"Yeh."

"They've a hundred pounds between 'em; one hundred pounds nineteen and fourpence. You'll not stop at that kanaka shop of Maloney's, d'ye hear?"

"My oath!" Jim touched his leaders tenderly, and the coach rolled down the red hill and across the tiny bridge that spanned the creek. Paul glanced at Jim sideways, and Jim winked with electric brevity.

"Beautiful morning," said Paul.

"Gid ap!" shouted Jim, bringing his lash cleverly under the leader's ear. "Yeh."

The four bays settled to a steady trot; Jim smiled amiably, jammed his heel on the squealing brakes, and moaned "The Wild Colonial Boy." Gaunt ridges lay humped and sullen in the dingy background. She-oaks darkened the swampy hollows in the west, and from the pools below came strident croakings that sounded like a distant foundry.

"How far is it from here to the Downs?" asked Paul suddenly. "Why do they call it Jackeroo Downs?"

"Cause they import their rouseabouts from England," said Jim promptly. "You'll hear all you want to know at Maloney's. Jim'll tell yer."

"Who is Jim?"

"He picks up the team at Lag's Point 'n' takes yous on ter Kelly's Flats. Jim's a cow ter talk; don't stand him; shut him up at the start!"

The coach wound through the lichened boulders, yawed over the sodden floors of mountain gullies, and pitched across the deep sand-drifts to the levels below. The bush rustled around and above them; naked gums and tea-tree showed the unending ridges: a mob of steers broke and wheeled suddenly around a distant spur, and thundered across the plain to the wooded gullies. Two drovers worked round steadily, heading them from the hollows to the open country. Their snake-like whips filled the ranges with pistol-echoes.

"Who are they?" asked Paul curiously.

"A travellin' mob from the Di'mantina. It's a rotten game; yer wouldn't catch me drovin', 'n' I've tried a few jobs in my time. I've dummied for squatters, 'n' I've worked in the Sydney sewers, but I never shore, thank Gawd, 'n' I never drove. Cattlemen are born idiots 'n' they look like cows and think like 'em. Same with shearers. Plain coaching is good enough for me, with its fourteen hours a day reg'lar. Gorra match?"

Paul handed him a box, which he forgot to return.

"Can you sing, mister?"

"No."

There was a long silence, and the coach thumped and rattled down the winding track. Quorking crows dropped away beyond the gidya belts; cairns of bleached bones showed the routes that Northern cattlemen had taken when they punched their starv-

ing herds down from the Gulf. A valley opened on their left, and Jim raced his horses across a floor of sandstone to the deep gut that was carpeted with rustling wind-piled leaves. Here and there amongst the gum-lined ridges a cattle-bell wandered, sometimes clanking ahead and dying out in far-off tinkles beyond the eternal dusk of the bush. The sun stole across mid-heaven, drenching the deep shadows with a yellow rain of light. A mirage flickered along the eastern plains, and more white bones marked the track of the old-man drought.

Paul dozed on the box. The world seemed wrapped in a golden gloom: a sky of brass held the mirage through the long forenoon; a flock of parrots hovered above the crackling roof of scrub.

The ring of an axe broke the stillness, and all along the valley the echoes wandered up to the walls of rock above.

Down came the giant tree, flinging red soil and stones into the pioneer's streaming face. He straightened his stooping shoulders and hailed the passing coach.

"Good day, Jim, my lad! How's all the folks? Ye haven't a letter for me, Jim, eh? Did ye hear onythin' of Mahony's chestnut mare? Some man left his rails down, an' Mahony's swearing like hell. Ye haven't a letter for me?"

"Naw. Good day!"

"Good day!"

The brown-limbed pioneer leant on his axe and watched the coach dip over the rise until the trees shut it out.

A bare-armed girl came hurrying down a narrow

bush-track. In the dingy background a slab hut leant dejectedly against a narrow strip of fence. Some fowls cruised in and out among the gums; an exultant rooster flew down from his perch in the scrub and crowed defiantly. Jim pulled up.

"Why, Eliza, have yer come back agin? Great Scott! I heerd that you 'n' Jim was managin' a station on the Paroo. How's Jim?"

"O.K.," said the girl cheerfully. "How's yourself, Jim?"

Jim frowned and shook his head. "Not too dusty, Eliza. I had Bill Ogilvie down last week; he just put his foot in a hole 'n' he won't be fit for yacker for months." He handed her a letter and winked significantly. "I heerd yer brought a pianner back with you this trip, Eliza. Ha, ha!"

Eliza's eyes beamed up at him from under her man's felt hat. "Course I did, stupid; can't a bush girl have her little piano? It would be mighty lonely down here without one. Jim's away; an' father's shearing somewhere near Warwick."

"Fetch out the pianner," said Jim, "'n' let's have a look at it, if you ain't too proud."

She lifted her shoulders and threw upon him a glance of caustic reproach. "I'm a bit proud now an' again perhaps, but I never put on side to you, Jim, never!" Her teeth flashed; an incredible number of dimples stole into her sun-tanned face.

"You just wait, mister Jim!" She ran back to the hut, followed by a soft-eyed cattle-pup.

"She can't carry a piano," said Paul protestingly.

Jim sat back laughing. "Gord 'elp us! what a new chum you are!"

Eliza came flying down the track, her eyes aglow in the dusky shadows, her feet scattering the dead leaves about the floor of the bush. A half-naked infant was clutching frantically at her loose hair and crowing with the joy of sudden motion.

Jim eyed the tiny atom critically, and drew an imaginary halo about it with his whip. "Lord, ain't he like Jim!"

He appealed to Paul, and Paul, who had never heard of this particular Jim, answered with conviction that the atom's mouth and chin were exact replicas of its father's.

Eliza beamed upon Paul. Jim took up the running.

"Just his father's way of shutting his hands 'n' screwing up his face. He'll grow up a ringer like his father, Liz: he'll grow up," said Jim, holding Paul's coat-lapel, "'n' ring the sheds from Nevertire to Menindie. Lord, how he *is* like Jim, to be sure!"

"Course he is," said Eliza, tossing him up and making faces. "He's got Jim's voice too. It ain't half so lonely down here now. Perhaps you would like a drink of milk? The gentleman looks real beat. Hold him, Jim, and I'll get yous a fresh drink."

Jim handed the reins to Paul and took the wide-eyed infant in his arms. Eliza was gone and back again in a few seconds, carrying a dipper and a pannikin in her hands. Paul drank deeply and

heaped a thirsty man's blessings upon her head. She stiffened a little at his offering of money, but relented almost immediately, and waved good-byes until the coach swung around the pine-covered spur at the valley-end.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCES PUBLICAN MALONEY, WITH OTHER DENIZENS OF THE BUSH

Maloney shuffled across the verandah, beating back the ring of flies that hunted him from corner to corner. The great bush artery ran north and south from his house, and travellers stopped frequently to imbibe his unwholesome liquors. Raw-boned cattlemen from the Northern Territory and the Gulf met on his verandah, to discuss routes and stock and the condition of the great Southern markets. Shearers gambled in the villainous back rooms, and the narrow turf-patch that fronted the pub had been the arena of many bitterly-fought contests.

Drovers are not to be confounded with shearers any more than the back-blocks cocky is to be compared with the miner. Your drover is the true Australian nomad; his cosmos is impregnated with gum and marsupial; his skin is stained with an Austral sun, his bones are charged with rheum begotten of the flood-waters of a hundred rivers.

With his pencil he will trace for you the best stock routes from Normanton to Bourke. A side-flourish across the leaf will indicate the Darling Downs. A stab of the pencil may locate the outside tracks where Squatter Flintsides has gridironed the country with fences and dogs, leaving nothing but scrub and sand for travelling mobs.

The bush breeds good animals; the city pavements give up broken-winded screws that are always ready for the knacker's yard. Measure him brain for brain with your average cockney, and the nomad comes out a very big man indeed. His instincts are wholesome and his conversation clean; the bar-nymph in it is shadowy and subordinated; and so——

Mrs. Maloney revolved out of the bar and joined her husband on the verandah. Mrs. Maloney was an eighteen-stone woman, with knotted red hair that curled about her narrow forehead like rams' horns. There were ancient beer-stains on her apron; her lips were thick and sensuous, and when your prosperous squatter stalked across her threshold they were oily with words of human kindness.

A faint pistol-like crack came over the hills. Maloney rolled forward fingering his monkey whiskers expectantly.

"Here's the coach, Bid! I wondher av that cursed omadhaun has a passenger?" He waddled into the road shading his eyes.

The coach stole over the summit, squealing in the deep ruts as the long whip flogged the jaded beasts into a canter. Mr. Maloney sidled indoors and rang a bell.

"Mary, get the mate ready; there's a passenger!"

Jim drew up smartly alongside the verandah; Maloney bade him good day.

"Ye'll be wantin' dinner, sorr?" he said, addressing Paul, with a Hibernian smile.

"I could eat a horse," laughed the young Frenchman.

"You'll get it," whispered Jim.

"This way, plaze, for the dining-room!" Mrs. Maloney led him into a dingy back room, heated like an oven and black with flies. The table was covered with a cloth that appeared to have gathered grease from the dinners of many generations. A wild-eyed, perspiring girl staggered in with a nickel-plated dish-cover.

"Corned bafe and pumpkin pie." Mrs. Maloney breathed it gently and raised the cover, revealing a black mass of boiled flesh.

"Pie for me," said Paul hurriedly, "pie for me; and may I trouble you for a glass of water?"

"Wather?" She looked at him amazed. "D'ye want a bath? Divil a wan av me ever heard of such a thing! Bath, shoo!"

She spread her greasy, offensive hands across the table and frowned at him. He stood up sickened and half angry. In his mind he compared the villainous pub with the clean inns of Brittany, where motherly dames hover about the traveller's chair, dusting a vagrant speck from the snowy linen, and tempting him with sweet dishes and palatable wines.

"Could I have a glass of milk?" he said desperately.

"Milk!" she snapped. "D'ye think that people have nothing to do but chase cows? There's Maloney's good beer in the bar, sixpence a glass."

"No, thanks; I'll wait until I get to Barcroft Downs."

He stepped on to the verandah and lit a cigarette. A couple of men were harnessing fresh horses to the coach. The four tired bays took their sweating flanks to the near lagoon and wallowed in the reeds. The thump of Maloney's feet made him look round.

"Fwhat's this oi hear av ye turnin' up your nose at tucker fit for a king?"

"I'm not a king, or I might have lost my head long ago, and eaten your meat," said Paul coolly.

"Yer a Spaniard or a dirty Frinchman, an' the country's cursed wid the loikes av ye," trumpeted Maloney.

"Hold yer blanky row!" Jim came out and caught his arm roughly. "Can't yer see that he's Lady Royal's new manager," he whispered.

Maloney expanded. "Fwhat wud oi care for the Royals? That ould she-cat niver spint a rap in me house. Sweat the Royals!"

"Easy, I tell yer!" whispered Jim, touching his elbow.

Maloney softened. "Ye'll not moind me, Jim; oi'm an ould man an' oi'm took now and thin wid a shpleen."

He reached for the driver's ear. "Oi hear that you're bringin' back three av the bhoys. Tell them that we have a purty gyurl up from Brisbane, that plays the piano loike a siriph. Bring the bhoys to me, Jim, an' oi'll thrate ye well. D'ye moind me, now?"

Jim took the reins and shook up the leaders. "Naw, Maloney, yer too bloomin' thrifty for God-

fearin' shearers. Do your own toutin' and bury your own dead!"

"Good-bye!" said Paul, raising his hat. "May everything you touch turn to corned beef and epigrams. Au revoir!"

Maloney stared after them stupidly, his eyebrows reeving like a gorilla's over his low frontal bone.

"Why are these bush publicans so anxious to get the shearers into their place?" asked Paul after a long silence.

Jim struck a match and lit his pipe. "Shearers are born mugs, an' it serves 'em right every time they're taken in. They'll save and pinch fer a year, won't spend a bean, won't buy a match if they can cadge one. They'll sneak yer boot-laces ter save threepence, 'n' sit up half the night ter do it; all ter make a big cheque fer Maloney 'n' t'other feller. Mister Shearer's a good-hearted bloke when he's drunk, 'n' that's about four weeks in a year; he puts in the other eleven months wearin' himself out tryin' ter take t'other feller down. Gord 'elp him!"

"I thought we were going to change drivers?"

"Naw, Jim's had a glass of Maloney's beer, 'n' he won't be able ter handle a team fer a bit. Maloney makes his own stuff, an' it's bad fer your clothes."

"How does it affect the clothes?"

Jim spat over the pole. "It won't hurt 'em unless yer spill it on 'em, 'n' then yer look as if yer'd been struck by lightning all down the front. Never soak at Maloney's."

The gaunt spurs had fallen away in the south-west. Clumps of white mahogany and box fringed

the open plains before them. Their two black leaders strained forward through the soft sand, pursued by swarms of relentless flies. The choking dust bit on the palate, and the smell of the horses became unendurable. Suddenly a line of posts sprang up on the left, and down to where the sun flared on the horizon stretched the endless wires that shut in Barcroft Downs. Paul gave a sigh of relief and refreshed himself with another cigarette.

"Here at last!" He braced his shoulders. "Gad! I'm not sorry either. I suppose the gate that leads to the house is hereabouts?"

"'Bout thirty miles lower down," said Jim softly; "maybe thirty-five."

Paul sat back as utterly crushed as if the earth had suddenly dropped from its track round the sun.

Within an hour the quick night had shut them in. The wide belts of timber on their right blazed with dusky flame, until the chopping north wind turned the floor of the bush into rolling scarves of fire.

"It's been burning on an' off fer a month," said Jim gloomily, "'n' if that wind should happen ter lick round to the south-west, you bet they'll smell hell on Barcroft Downs."

"Would you be glad to see the Downs on fire?"

Jim spat into the hollow of his hand, and cut the near wheel horse across the shoulder.

"I ain't got no grudge against the Royals. I've heard that Miss Aimée's a lady 'n' a white woman. I caught a whaler onst lightin' a heap of sticks yonder; I jest let the horses rip 'n' went fer him. He could scrap a bit, but I was too long in the gun fer him, so I plugged him fer ten minutes 'n' let him

go. I told Tonson how I'd saved the station a few hundred pounds, 'n' he up 'n' calls me a rotten liar. He said there wasn't a shearer or stockman that had spunk enough to light up his station. That's Tonson all over; he'd slap the Almighty in the face 'n' knock the soul-case out of a shearer's agreement. He ain't liked, 'n' some of the station hands said I wanted flogging fer plugging Jim."

"Is Jim the only name hereabouts?"

Jim scratched his head reflectively. "There's heaps of other names, but you happen to have struck a patch of Jims, I'll admit. There's Bill MacPherson, 'n' Willy Morgan, 'n' Billy Smith, 'n' Will Stokes, 'n' William Williams, 'n' Bill the bound'ry rider. There's heaps of other names, on'y I can't call 'em to mind."

A camp-fire glowed in the distance. Jim pulled up and watched two men who were sparring before the cheerful blaze. The taller one looked up and dropped hands. "Yer too good, Jim! That left of yours smashes through me guard. I'll take lessons in Sydney before I stick 'em up to you again."

"These are the shearer blokes," whispered the driver to Paul.

A third figure crawled out of the tent and looked up at the coach. "What time d'ye come past here, boss?"

"'Bout eleven," said Jim. "Better have yer swags ready 'n' don't keep me waitin'."

Paul leaned over and scrutinised them closely. They wore flannel shirts and patched moleskins. The pugilist named Jim was big-boned and sinewy; his nose was bashed almost to the level of his face.

He grinned genially at Paul, and the scars of battle seemed to open afresh from the prominent points of his lemon-skinned face.

"Look out for Maloney!" laughed Paul. "He's sitting on the wood-heap singing for your scalps."

"You mind your own —— business!" The three stood in a row and shouted it after him.

"Serves yer right," said Jim. "Yer can't give 'em points; they know too much." Paul hung his head, and never afterwards warned a shearer against the beer-serpents of the bush.

A pair of buggy-lamps turned into the track, and danced nearer until they could see a white face staring at them under a girlish hand.

"That's Monty Speed!" whispered Jim. "He's come to drive you up to the homestead. It won't take him long, I'll bet."

"Good night, Jim!" Monty pulled up across the track. "Mr. Barradas is aboard, I believe?"

"Here we are," said Paul jumping down. "I'll transfer this luggage of mine, please."

Jim untied the cape over the boot and placed the big trunk in the buggy. "Good night!" he said hoarsely, and steered his team down another track.

"Good night!"

Paul watched until the lamps flickered and died away in the hot darkness. Monty was looking at him intently and smiling.

"Rough trip, eh, Mr. Barradas?"

"Pretty bad, if I'm a judge," answered Paul.

"Where did you dine?"

"Dine! Ugh!—I was offered some boiled man at Maloney's, and I declined."

"He's had that identical piece of meat ever since I can remember," said Monty. "It's a mean point to score off a hungry traveller; but every one in this country strives after his little point."

Paul looked at him closely, and saw that he was about his own age and dark as a gypsy. His mouth was girlish, and a tangle of curls clung about his forehead. His eyes dozed and burned alternately. The lamps showed the twisted reins about his girlish hands, as he worked his pair of chestnuts through the scrub.

"The sort of man that Southern women knife," thought Paul.

He wondered if Monty had ever met Aimée. Had he also been picked up on some ocean tramp, and sent to rusticate in the wilderness? The thought stung him a little.

"Think you'll like station life?" Monty glanced at him sideways.

"I'm going to try. Are you an Australian?"

"Yes, worse luck; I've been bred amongst cattle and sheep, and I've only met two pretty women in all my life."

Paul looked into his brooding girlish face, noted the quick blood on his cheek, the clear eyes that lighted as he talked, and pondered the present and future of such men.

The crackle of hoofs and the sound of the working harness filled the silence. In the distance were fires that glowed like visions of Dante. The bush opened fanwise, revealing the clear velvet darkness of the night. A curlew wailed, and from some near hollow came the bark of a dingo. Lights twinkled

ahead; a mob of colts stampeded across the track and crashed into the solitudes again.

They were nearing the homestead. Scattered huts and pens dropped away behind the turning wheels; a few sheep ran bleating into the scrub; and a sudden burst of strident laughter brought with it a cheerful sense of man's proximity.

"Is Mr. Tonson about the premises?" asked Paul.

Monty shook his head. "You won't see him to-night. But you'll find a room fixed up for you, and plenty of good tucker waiting."

Something white ran across the track and dashed under the windless eucalypt that barred out a white rib of moon. Monty pulled up.

"Is dat you, Monty?"

"Yes, Bingy. Wait a bit, I'll give you a lift. It's Tonson's youngster," he said to Paul; "he's the queerest little chap in the world."

Bingy was lifted into the buggy, breathing gratitude, and staring at Paul. He crouched between Monty's knees, and the light glanced on his spiky hair and his dusty freckled face. His legs were bare, and the pink shirt tucked into his pants was ragged beyond description.

"How are you, Bingy?" Paul felt for his hand. "And why do you wander about the bush by yourself, eh?"

"I was waiting for Monty," he said querulously. "Monty 'n' me plays euchre, 'n' he gives me the game every time."

"He's only seven," put in Monty apologetically,

"and he stacks the cards without fear. He'd cheat his own father, Mr. Barradas."

A soft chuckle came from Monty's knees. Two smeary fists wandered up and down Paul's leg, touching his boots and stroking the edge of his coat. Bingy sighed reflectively.

"What's the matter?" Monty bent over him.

"He ain't got no patches in his pants yet, Monty. He's a toff, ain't he?" And Bingy began crooning softly, with his cunning, wistful face resting on Monty's knee.

CHAPTER III

BEGINS AN ACQUAINTANCE WITH STATION-LIFE; AND SETS A BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK

"WELL, how do you like your diggings?"

Monty bobbed his head through the window and looked at Paul stretched on the iron bedstead, his arms resting above him, his body inert and curled in an ecstasy of after-repose.

"I feel as if I'd finished my first journey across the floor of the Pit, old man. Anyhow, I dreamt that Jim got bogged in the flood waters of the Styx, and that the condemned cattle came and lowed at us all along the banks. I shall begin work to-day."

"Can you ride?"

Monty watched him as he flung himself from the bed and stood swinging his arms in the centre of the room; his shoulders were magnificently developed; the twining muscles bunched and quivered under the silk sleeves of his pyjamas.

"Ride? I used to stick on an Irish hunter once. I suppose an ordinary cross-country rider is only considered a middling horseman amongst the crack riders of the station. Please report me at head-quarters as middling only."

"Come and have breakfast! You'll get a bellyful of horse before we are done with you."

"Is Mr. Tonson about?"

"No, he's got a boiled head or something; he's been down with fever, and he's just pulling through. His room is close to this one. Didn't you hear him trembling in the night?"

"There were too many insects gnashing their teeth, and the gentleman in the next room brained them with such dreadful thuds that I couldn't hear anything."

A flat-roofed shed faced the window. A sleepy-eyed rouseabout loafed aimlessly about the yard, followed by half a dozen sheep-dogs and cross-bred dingoes. Beyond the whitewashed buildings lay a vista of high-railed enclosures.

"Things are quiet now," said Monty; "but wait till mustering time; wait till the shearers begin to drop in. We've both sheep and cattle here, and breed a few horses as well."

All around them was the great Australian silence, the everlasting greys, the dingy sepias of the far-off trees. Quorking crows lined the white outbuildings. A Chinese cook grinned from the kitchen window.

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After breakfast Monty took Paul to his own room. It was artistically decorated with many curious implements of war. An aboriginal god smiled woodenly from an obscure shelf. Spears and boomerangs lined the walls. Over the mosquito net hung the model of a New Guinea canoe. Monty opened a large tin box, and emptied out a heap of books and old magazines.

"You can feed your intellect here when it gets hungry—and here's a pack of cards—infinite variety for the thirsty soul!"

Monty fingered the pack lovingly; there was a sudden gleam in his dozing eyes. He began shuffling unconsciously, and dealt out small hands to a group of imaginary gamesters.

"Know any tricks, Barradas?"

"Only a few simple ones that a child could detect."

Monty held three cards in his palm—the queen of clubs and two small diamonds.

"I suppose you could pick out the queen?" he said, grinning, and dropped them face down on the table.

Paul watched him closely and tapped the centre card.

"Right; you've played this game before! Try again." He waved them over the table with many subtle flourishes, and spread them out.

Paul indicated the nearest card. Monty looked discouraged.

"Bet you've been taken down on a race-course; you French fellows are travelling needles. Just watch for the elusive queen once more."

"Can't help seeing where she goes! I wonder how men get robbed at a game like this?" said Paul.

Monty held up the queen and dropped it between the two diamonds. "You'd bet she's there now?"

"Bet! I'd put my last cent on the middle card, only it would be robbing you." He picked up the card and threw it across the table.

"Tray of diamonds," murmured Monty. "That's a point to me, Barradas. Let me give you another. Don't play with any man that you haven't

known for ten years. Lord, how some of our gaping thick-handed mud-rakers would rook you! What's the matter?"

Paul had reached forward, laughing to hide his confusion, and had taken up an album. The first page showed Aimée Royal smiling in an alcove of gummed ferns. The hot blood splashed into Monty's cheeks.

Paul looked at him confounded; a half-shaped thought cut him like a knife. This gypsy Adonis loved her then. He might have guessed that two such natures would be attracted; it was only natural that his dark blood should seek a fairer race. Aimée was fair—with grey eyes and white creamy skin, and hair that brindled like swarming bees. Perhaps Monty had tasted her sweet breath; perhaps he had kissed her lips. He stiffened against the door, his fingers clutching the edge and swaying it to and fro.

Monty watched him half sullenly; a nervous tremor stirred his full lips. "You won't tell of me, Barradas; I stole that photo."

"Stole it!" Paul checked an oath that lingered in his throat. "What do you mean?"

Monty's breath came sharply; he closed the album softly and placed it in the box. "My aboriginal impulse; I've got the soul of a nigger and the brains of a white man."

"If you wanted the photo very badly, of course there was no choice but to take it," said Paul.

Monty ignored the infused bitterness; he sat on the bed resting his brooding face in the palm of his fist.

"It was the only thing I ever saw worth stealing, Barradas."

"Did Miss Royal come up here?"

"No, she hasn't been here for some years, though she likes the place. We were mates when I was a youngster. Her mother sent for me to Brisbane. I had never been out of the bush before; I had never seen anything bigger than a bush township, and when I saw Brisbane it frightened me. A man took me down to the sea, and I fell on my knees before it. I was seventeen then; now I am twenty-two, and I wouldn't go on my knees to a god. I saw Lady Royal in her room. She looked as sick as a lonely Chinaman."

"Opium," said Paul.

"I knew; but I didn't think she was mad."

"Is she? I found her sane enough."

Monty chuckled. "Jove! the old horror took me in her arms and hugged me—called me her own Egyptian boy. Now, wasn't that nice?"

"It was very unusual," said Paul. "She generally stabs a fellow with her tongue until he feels that some one has robbed him of his spine. She hugged you, eh! Now, that was queer!"

"Yes, and she gave King Monty many valuable reminders of her affection. Our leave-taking was quite pathetic, and I had to promise to visit her at least once a year."

"What made you lift the photo?"

"Dunno; it was smiling so hard at me from a heap of ornaments—and I thought of this lonely room and the son of a gun of a life I lead. You

know the rest; and now that picture seems to fill the God-forsaken emptiness of life out-back."

"You didn't meet Miss Royal, then?"

"No; she was aboard the yacht all the time I was in Brisbane—laid up with her eyes." Monty stretched his supple figure to the ceiling. "But we shall meet at Philippi."

Paul glanced with a sigh of relief at this tawny, lithe-limbed son of the bush. "What was the cause of Lady Royal's fancy for you, do you think?"

"They say she knew me when I lived with the 'possum and the bear in the ranges. One of the boundary-riders found me in a cave, and brought me home in his blanket. He exhibited me at a bob a head to the shearers. That's the yarn, anyhow." He looked at Paul suddenly. "You haven't told me anything yet. We heard that you were a big friend of the Royals." Monty edged to the window and glanced across the yard. "They say that Miss Aimée takes a big interest in you."

Paul lit a cigarette. For one brief moment he felt a flush of pride. The mere association of his name with Aimée's set his heart leaping to his throat; and well he knew that the crease on Monty's brow was caused by a spasm of jealous thought. The next moment he was telling the story of his life in England—concealing nothing, not even his ignominious position on board the *Murrumbidgee*. "And now," he concluded, "I promised Miss Royal that I'd put things straight, and I'm going to begin right away."

Monty was silent; but from the inside corner of

his eyes he watched Paul. "You'll find Tonson a queer animal," he said at last. "And I'm sorry that I can't give you his particular key-note. He is the great undefined and there are no given points to which he'll succumb. He's all husk; I've winnowed him through and through, and there never was a man with so small a quantity of wheat in him —sift him for yourself." He peeped from the door to the verandah hastily. "Thought I heard his tread! Will you come for a ride? I'll show you a corner of the run."

Paul accepted gladly, and Monty led the way to a small hut where saddles of every description and workmanship lined the walls. He reached down an elegantly finished pigskin and tossed it over. "There are a couple of crocks in the yard; you can pick your fancy."

Paul cornered a wiry black mare that allowed him to saddle her without trouble. He gripped her mane and swung himself into his seat. Monty sidled up on a fiddle-headed chestnut that squealed viciously and tried to bite his leg. A small crowd suddenly collected from nowhere, and watched intently.

The new-chum generally takes his first ride under depressing circumstances; volleys of ridicule and criticism spring from every post. The air is charged with bush idioms as the man from over-sea bumps idiotically in his seat; but good horsemanship passes in silence. Paul's seat showed early training—the easy hand, the immovable knee, and the graceful slouch taught in French riding-schools; and he had superadded poise and balance under the eye of a friendly English master of hounds.

"His style's all right," said a lean-visaged warrior from the Mitchell; "but put him on an old camp horse in a round up, and he'd fall off. I'd bet a long beer," said the Mitchell man dreamfully, "that he'd fall off. Anybody want to bet?"

Somebody said "Rot," and offered to bet a hundred pounds that the new-chum bloke would keep his seat all the year. "Money down and no funny business. Lend's a match."

Then the Mitchell man grew red and said he'd bet a hundred pounds, stuff up and no shinannakin. The crowd disappeared in a whirl of gesticulations punctuated by bets of a hundred pounds.

CHAPTER IV

WAVERS BETWEEN ONE SIDE OF CHARACTER AND ANOTHER SIDE OF LIFE

A SOUTH wind tossed to motion the leafy levels in the distance. Across the western ridges flared a blood-red sun that burned the jagged cloud-pinnacles to gold.

Paul cast a glance upward and rambled through the silent outbuildings into the store-room; he rested here awhile and discovered that the rotting shingles had let in the rains of many summers. Bags of sugar and flour were piled under the leaky roof; valuable farming implements lay rusting in damp corners. He looked up at the cracks that could have been repaired in a day, and grunted himself back to the house, wondering what manner of overseer managed Barcroft Downs.

A cracking voice broke from the yard, a voice that seemed to hack the air.

"Ye'll no shoot, but ye'll threaten me every time ah turn my back. When ah come at ye straight ye'll retire and hold a meetin' to call me names. Ah'm a drunken sot; ah'm fair barmy six days oot o' the week; but one sober day o' me is enough to last ye the whole year."

A couple of station hands slunk across the yard behind the shed. The speaker grinned at their retreat.

"That's Tonson, Barradas; keep your tail over your shoulder." Monty showed his head from a near window and disappeared.

A man of medium height hobbled across the yard; his face was edged with stiff ape-like whiskers, his thin freckled hands dabbled a handkerchief between them. Paul walked up.

"Mr. Tonson, I believe?" he said briskly.

Tonson propped and swung round. "Eh?" He faced Paul with a pair of blinking lashless eyes.

"My name's Barradas. I understand that Miss Royal notified you about my coming."

"Ah'm verra glad to meet ye, Mister Barradas." His voice cracked suddenly. "An' what d'ye think ye're fit for? Mony's the good buck-jumper ye never rode!"

"I'm not a circus man," grinned Paul. "I'm a book-keeper with a talent for figures. How do you find yourself, Mr. Tonson?"

Tonson sat in a hammock that swung from a verandah-beam and dabbled his wet palms. "Ah'm no feelin' verra bonny, thank ye." Again the lashless lids measured Paul inch by inch; his skinny forefinger looped itself in the tangle of hay-coloured whisker. "Ah'm thinkin', Mr. Barradas, that ye'll find no book-keepin' here; ah can do it verra weel mysel'. Ah canna unnerstan' Miss Royal yokin' me wi' an accountant; it's verra fuilish."

"I wouldn't worry about that. You can sit back a bit and take quinine. You're ailing, Mr. Tonson, and want a rest."

Tonson squinted over his shoulder, baring his gums unpleasantly. "Ye can please go ta the

deevil, Mr. Barradas, and tak' my compliments doon to your freens. So ye were oot ridin' this morn?" He threw his head aside and grinned maliciously.

"Yes, I rode one of your scrubbers, Mr. Tonson; and to tell you the truth I wouldn't put a monkey on such horses."

"We ha'e some verra guid horses, Mr. Barradas; ah'm thinkin' ye picked one of the children's geegees. Ye didna fall off, eh?" He threw back his head and surveyed Paul afresh. "Mon, you're braw —just braw and tailorish. I wadna hae guessed ye'd come to look after auld Tonson."

"But you'll have to hand over the station accounts, Mr. Tonson."

"Ah'll dae no siccan thing, Mr. Barradas; but ah'll be glad to pit ye wi' yon rooseabouts: p'und a week and found. Eh-h! but yon's a bonny chance for ye! An' if ah see ye warkin' weel ah'll lend ye Robbie Burns to complete your education."

Paul turned his back and paced the verandah half savagely.

"Ah weel, gin ye'll no tak' the billet, ah'll e'en wash my han's o' ye; but ye'll no tell the rooseaboots that ah offered ye the job; they're a wee parteecular." He dropped into the hammock, covered his face from the ring of flies and chanted "Ye Banks and Braes" through his nose with dreary iteration.

Paul flung himself from the verandah in disgust. Tonson's manner puzzled him exceedingly. A brief survey of the office proved to him that no visible books were kept; the place was bare save for a dusty

insurance almanac and a couple of untrustworthy maps of northern stock-routes.

He approached Monty's room, and stumbled across Bingy sweating in the centre of a well-constructed fortification. Bingy looked up absently, and reached for a jam tin to fill the ancient moat with water from an adjacent rain-barrel.

Monty came stumbling across the verandah and strode unconsciously through the shell-lined battlements. Bingy sat down with a gasp and set up a pitiful bleating.

Monty's apology was almost pathetic in its sincerity. "I'm a camel," he said, "a big blundering oont with the head of an owl. Who am I that I should destroy the works of a master builder?"

His manner was abject as he placed sixpence on the dust-heap. Bingy crowed softly, and sat on his broken walls like a reinstated sultan.

Monty beckoned Paul away, produced a pocket-book, and frowned upon it severely.

"What's up?" asked Paul.

Monty took him aside confidentially. "There's going to be a fight in ten minutes. For the last two seasons there's been a lot of skite going on between the Rager and little Joe Harrison from Nevertire. Both the men have been training hard, and I'm backing the little fellow heavily. Last night the Rager had a spar with a friend, and Lord, he's quicker than a cat! I'll have to hedge, or I'm a goner."

"Why are they going to fight?" inquired the young Frenchman.

"Oh, they're the best of friends. It's the purse

they want, and they'll eat fire to get it." He took Paul's arm. "Come and look on, but don't bet. I dare say there's fifty men waiting. All our chaps are in, and a few outsiders. Four of Rager's backers rode in from the township. Gad! those fellows would ride across the floor of Tophet to see a scrap."

They strolled to the rear of the homestead, where a belt of coolabahs shut in a piece of level country. A score of horses were tied up to a rail; gaunt fly-netted men in cabbage-tree hats loafed about a ring that had been pegged out in the centre of the paddock.

Monty was greeted with shouts and inquiries. "What price the Rager?"

"Six to four," cried Monty, whipping out his book and fiddling with a pencil. "I'll lay the Rager —six to four on the Rager up to a pony!" Within three minutes he had registered half a dozen bets.

A lean black-haired youngster slouched to the ring and vaulted over like a deer. "Good luck to ye, Mike!" yelled a brick-red Irishman. "Thump the sowl case out av him, Mike; ye look fit to bate a rigiment."

"That's the Rager," whispered Monty; "he's from the Richmond; and looks good, by gad!"

Paul ran his eye along the narrow hips, the thin forearm and knotty biceps, and nodded.

"Here's Joe!" shouted the crowd. A tremendous cheer went up, because Joe was five-feet-five and gamer than a bantam. It was whispered that he had his wife and child camped in the bend of the

creek, and there were hints that the five-pound purse would be very acceptable.

"Six to four the Rager!" cried Monty. "I'll lay six to four in quids!"

Harrison half turned, grinned amiably, and threw off his sweater, revealing a forty-six inch chest and limbs that rippled with muscle. His fists were enormous for so small a man, and his magnificent chest spread out from his lean waist like a fan. When he flung himself into the ring his bull-neck creased and showed the bunching ropes of muscle.

"I'll take yer six ter four, Monty!" cried several.

Monty ran his pencil up the column of figures and shook his head. "Even money, gents—even money; Joe looks fit to wallop Peter Jackson."

The crowd breathed impatiently. Monty turned to Paul and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"This fight has been in the air for three months, and somehow men who live scores of miles away are breathing battle. It's merely animal instinct; somebody barks and the bark is answered, and a crowd of human fighters collect round the noise. If you ask these strangers why they came up here, they'd say, 'For the fight!' Ask them again how they got wind of the fight, and they couldn't tell you. Queer, isn't it?" He put his hand to his mouth and leaned over the ropes.

"Even money before they start!"

Silence followed, and the two gladiators crouched forward into the centre of the ring. The Rager's left fist stroked the air like a cat about to dab at a mouse; his lithe torso sloped backwards; his feet crunched round and round the watchful sunburnt

devil before him. He feinted; Harrison slipped away grinning.

Again the Rager feinted, and Harrison ducked and sent his enormous fist with a smash on to the bared lips above him.

"A pretty kiss!" sang Monty.

Paul shrugged his shoulders, as with a sudden shift of ground the lean-bodied Rager cornered the little man and battered him to earth with a shower of terrific blows.

"Time!" called a fat man in a cabbage-tree hat; and the crowd drew a long breath.

In the tenth round Harrison was blundering about the ring, his face beaten to a pulp, his body livid from the hellish punishment he had endured. The Rager showed no marks on his lissom body, save a patch of blood on his breast where his opponent's face had rested when they had clinched.

"Finish him, Rager!" screamed the Irishman.

"Joe's wife'll have ter battle along without that fiver," said some one. "And she'll be nursing another youngster next month."

Harrison turned his formless face for an instant and rocked backwards. The Rager crouched nearer, his body trembling with the exultation of victory. He dropped his guard-arm and swung it for a savage upper-cut: like a flash Harrison jumped in; one terrible fist smashed under his opponent's jaw, the other stabbed the pulsing flesh over the heart. The Rager went to earth like a falling tree.

"I'll pay out," said Monty. "Weigh in, my noble sports, and make no remarks."

The fight was ended, and the victorious Harrison

crawled back to his wife and camp like a man who had been broken on the wheel. The five sovereigns lay in his waistcoat pocket where the blood was squashing through the lining.

"Fine soul-inspiring bash, wasn't it?" said Monty, grinning.

Paul made a wry face. "Not very pretty. The sword is cleaner, anyway."

CHAPTER V

TINCTURES WITH POESY THE WATERS OF AFFLICTION

Next day Paul rode into the township and sent this telegram to Brisbane. "Manager refuses to show books. What shall I do?"

At sundown a man came with a reply. Paul read it again and again, and felt better after each reading.

"If Mr. Tonson will not hand over books please dismiss him, and take charge yourself as per authority given you. Aimée Royal."

Paul smiled grimly. He pocketed the telegram and strolled towards the stockyard. He had wondered why every one save Monty treated him with contempt: a laugh followed him whenever he walked amongst the men. The word's "Frenchy" and "Jackeroo" were taken up jeeringly from mouth to mouth.

Tonson's cracked voice was heard in the distance, and presently he slouched up.

"Weel, Mr. Barradas: ha'e ye naught tae do?" He went into the house and returned with a faded green volume.

"Ah'm thinking ah'll read ye what Robbie Burns says about loafers."

His words nerved Paul to attack.

"If you'll look in your office, Mr. Tonson, you'll find a telegram. I have another. When you've

read yours I shall be glad to explain myself. I shall also relieve you of an uncongenial task."

Tonson's face lit up; he too smelt battle, and in his mind's eye he saw this objectionable intruder handing in his resignation. He chuckled softly and thrust Burns into his pocket. Then he walked to the office.

He came out with the message crumpled in his hand, and his teeth closed with a snap; a sudden flush relieved the sallows of his face. Then he looked at Paul, and turned again into the dingy little office.

Paul followed him inside and dropped into a chair at the head of the writing-table. The room smelt like a piece of excavated Pompeii: a dozen ledgers and day-books had been dragged from some obscure retreat and lay in dusty disorder along the rotting shelves.

Tonson sat down with a cry that might have been wrung with rheumatism; his hands were gripped across his knees, he rocked backward and forward, and words seemed to choke in his lean throat.

Paul glanced round, feeling himself the master. "What a hole! One would imagine that it was stocked with precious gods by the way you shut people out!"

"Ah've tried tae keep ye oot, Mr. Barradas, but by some means or ither ye have come in. Are ye no satisfied?" His voice was querulous and uncertain. He mopped his face. "Barradas, ye've played me a verra scurvy trick. Ah didna think it of ye." He spread the telegram across the table and blinked at it with his lashless lids.

Paul stood up.

"You knew why I was sent up here, Mr. Tonson."

"Oh, ah knew perfectly weel, Mr. Barradas; but ah thocht ye'd have gumption enough ta see that it was nae guid rinnin' up against the auld mon."

"Understand me!" said Paul firmly. "I came up here to serve Miss Royal; you are dealing with a grateful man—not a mean one. I am here to put things straight, and you are trying to stop me."

Tonson had regained his composure. "I don't want to push you out of your job. But I'm bound to look after Miss Royal's property. Hand over the books, and we'll see how the land lies."

Tonson wiped his face anew. His manner underwent a change.

"Mr. Barradas, ah'm an auld mon. Ye'll no drive me frae Barcroft Doons. Ah'm no properly recovered frae fever. Ye'll no drive me . . ."

"Show me your books!" Paul turned as though to leave the office. Tonson hobbled to the door entreatingly.

"Ah'll show ye onythin', Mr. Barradas; but ye'll gie me a chance, mon. A chance, Mr. Barradas! A chance! Ah'll mak' recovery if ye'll gie me a month or so!" He crept to a safe in the corner of the room and unlocked it. "Ye maun juist wark yere wull. Here ye are! But ye'll no mak' heid or tale unless ah help ye."

"We'll see," said Paul grimly.

"Ay!" said Tonson; "and ye'll no be forgettin' that ah'm an auld mon. Be guid to me, Mr. Barradas, an' ah'll serve ye weel."

He took a bottle and a glass from the top of the

safe and poured out a stiff nobbler of whisky. His face gleamed with a sudden ferocity. "An' may ye roast for the ill ye've wrought me, Barradas!"

Paul made a movement.

"Na, na, I didna mean it! Ah'm juist a puir auld mon, Mr. Barradas. Ye'll be vera guid tae me, I ken weel."

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out Burns. "There's a wee bit here ah'd like tae read ye, Mr. Barradas."

CHAPTER VI

WHICH CLOSES A DOOR THAT A DOOR MAY OPEN

Shearing-time came round, and the silent sheds of Barcroft Downs grew suddenly alive with bleating sheep and bearded men. The cries of "Tar" and "Wool away" sounded above the clacking hoofs on the battens when the scared sheep ran in. Now and then a long bullock-team with its pyramid of fleecy bales wandered across the flats; and Paul would stand in the sun and watch it crawling over the horizon like a centipede on the floor of the bush.

Paul sighed as he placed Aimée's last letter in the drawer. He had told her of Tonson's mismanagement, appending a note that the manager might, if given a chance, make good what he had squandered. The man knew his business, and Paul was a tyro. With a tight hand on the finances he felt that Tonson's shrewdness, aided by a couple of good seasons, could make Barcroft Downs splendidly profitable. Aimée had approved of his merciful suggestion, and Tonson was permitted to continue in his old position.

Paul glanced around his fly-haunted room and out at the lime-washed sheds beyond the race. The hoarse whoopings of shepherds filled the air as the scampering dogs heeled and worked the struggling sheep into the pens. He thought of the lonely yacht

speeding along the Barrier waters; he thought of Aimée leaning over the rail while a captain shouted orders from the poop. She had told him all her news as frankly as a sister might have told him. But for two months he had heard nothing from her.

His mind moved slowly down the vista of the past. Lady Royal shadowed the background with her monocle, her loose gibbering mouth, her feline sneer. And this mother of Aimée was steeped in all the vices of Asia. He trembled for Aimée's future—the more because of the vast wealth that would be hers.

And then . . . He thought of his own father—of that refined intelligence succumbing by degrees to the influence of brutal desperadoes. Paul could almost hear Jean's voice calling on the sea to engulf him. He was filled with a brooding anger against the unknown power that had dragged such a man down from high citizenship to the nickel mines of New Caledonia. And he told himself once more that the son's place was by the father's side if—Paul shuddered—that father still lived.

He wondered whether Aimée would treat him with such marked preference if she knew that he was the son of the notorious Doctor Barradas! More than once he had felt a keen desire to tell her, and silence the conscience which insisted that he was a mere adventurer, an unworthy dependent on the charity of a generous girl.

He surveyed again his memories of the voyage of the *Murrumbidgee*. What was the secret of Lady Royal's fantastic bounty? Had she ever known his

father? Had she . . .? He lost himself in conjecture.

The din of a wool-press recalled him to himself. Tonson's voice cracked out above the yelping collies.

"Ye'll yard the five hundred Soothdoons and tak' them to Mac's, d'ye hear?"

"Yeh," said a small voice.

"Ye'll no sell wi'oot a cheque. Hold him close to price; he'll be wanting the ewes bad. Dinna ye touch Mac's whusky!"

"Naw."

"Ye're a fine rider, Jimmy?"

"Middlin', Mr. Tonson."

"Ye dinna think sae, Jimmy—ye dinna think sae. Eh, mon! but ye're fair daft wi' pride. Ah'll pit a tin mirror across the plains that ye may see yersel' jigging on your gee-gee!"

Tonson crossed to the shed and idled among the sweating shearers. The men dropped their heads as his boots kicked amongst the fleeces. The down-bent eyes were savage; and the clash of shears filled the sudden silence. The very dogs doubled back to the crowding sheep in the race; "pickers" and "broomers" worked like devils at the first sign of his shadow. He limped through, stopping here and there to jeer some fumbling wretch, or to pat a ringer's back, as the humour took him. He halted before a sappy-cheeked Maorilander, who was cursing softly at the burr-covered ram between his knees.

"What wad ye do wi' your last bawb, Ernie?"

Ernie glanced from under his thick brows and

moistened his lips. "I'd put it in the collection plate," he answered quickly. Tonson had the reputation of being religious, and the gentle Ernie had an eye to future favours.

The manager frowned. "Eh, mon! ye'd be daft to gang wi'oot your supper—clean daft!"

He passed along to a swart, black-haired youngster from the Barcoo. "What wad ye do wi' your last bawb, Wully?"

"Wully" straightened his long back and dropped his left eyelid to the grinning ranks beside him. "I'd save it till I met a shearer cove with a cheque. Then I'd shout him a drink."

A rippling of shoulders followed the reply; there was a round of smothered laughter and a sudden bleating of sheep.

"That's no a bad idee!" Tonson grinned and rubbed his hands. "But there's nocht in it but beer."

A short-necked Geordie caught his eye. He ran his fingers through the pile of fleece before the "Classer," and tossed it aside. "What wad ye do wi' your last bawb, Davy?"

Davy looked up with a smirk. "Phat wud I do wi' me last bawb? Ah'd just save it till I could pit another yen wi' it for company."

Tonson smote his thigh a mighty blow. "Eh, Davy! ye're juist gran'! Ye'll gae doon tae Mrs. McAllister an' she'll gie ye a mince pie."

"I canna stap ma' shearin' noo, Mr. Tonson; but I'll be verra gled o' the pie to-night," said Davy cautiously.

Tonson passed round to the homestead with his

large hands bunched in the hollow of his back. A couple of sundowners limped up to the kitchen, and Paul heard Tonson calling them half the names in the animal kingdom. He strolled back to his room and fidgeted aimlessly with some loose papers in his drawer, and again his thoughts flew back over the months that had elapsed since he had left France.

His spirits had been depressed lately. Monotony had succeeded to the novelty of Barcroft Downs, and he looked often into the future. "Some day," thought Paul, "I may grow rich; I will work, work! and the wealth will come—it shall come! and if ever I am able to find out the wretch who contrived this crime against my father, by God! I will strike hard and quick, even though I have to smite a President of the Republic!"

But . . . in the first place, he must repay by honest labour the woman who had helped him. His feelings toward Lady Royal were hard to define. As the mother of Aimée, he looked upon her with something like veneration. To be the mother of such a daughter, he mused, she must at one time have been capable of noble deeds, exalted love. He could never forget how Calphurnia's iron will was swayed by her daughter's merest whim. He had seen her in the throes of opium-nausea, her talon fingers fondling Aimée's hands, her faded eyes lit with the fiercest mother-love. Calphurnia might have known all infamy, but heart-tendrils bound her to the one woman worth everything in the world to him.

The dusk deepened, and the night fell clear and windless. Grey star-belts lightened the dark hol-

low of mid-heaven; a smell of the sun lingered over the sandy floor of the yard.

From the crowded huts beyond the pens came the roar of many voices. Some one vamped an accordion, and a banjo was heard shrill and alone.

The following night Paul received a telegram from Aimée. "Come to Brisbane at once," it said.

PART III

THE REVENGE OF CALPHURNIA

CHAPTER I

GIVES THE READER A GLIMPSE OF A FRENCH CONVICT SETTLEMENT IN THE PACIFIC

Surveillant Carnac sat on a boulder with a rifle across his knee and the Pacific Ocean at his back. Through his half-closed eyes he watched his convict gang as it took shelter from the dynamite that rent the belly of the hill, flinging rocks and stones into the grassy hollow beneath.

Nothing interested Surveillant Carnac. The same murderous faces, the same retreating foreheads and bulging jowls, sprang from every cutting; he had seen them all before, and their aspect palled.

. . . . .

Here are the pick of European desperadoes, the dregs of the French canaille. Yon deep-jawed dwarf with the hammer is a good-conduct man; he murdered an old woman at Rouen for three francs and a loaf of white bread. Next year he will be a *libéré*.

The bald, white-eyed convict kneeling under the shelf of rock is Jacques Magnier. He is very pious, and the prison authorities entrust him with packages of dynamite for blasting purposes. Three years ago the excellent Magnier broke from the hulks at Toulon, nearly killed a warder, and tried

hard to begin life anew in the counterfeit coin business. Now Magnier is very pious, and Magnier is in charge of the dynamite.

Boom! The gang slinks forward with shovel and barrow. Some stagger under high blocks of stone and wheel them into the trucks that run from the main quarry to the half-built sea-wall.

Surveillant Carnac nods. A screw of smoke rises upon the western horizon. Inch by inch the low yards of an Australian steamer steal up from the wide blue hollow. Presently she rolls in the choppy seas of the Boulari passage, and rounds the lighthouse.

Half a dozen convicts skulk behind their barrows, gaping at the incoming vessel, betting minute fragments of priceless tobacco on her name and nationality. The warder's rifle clinks on the loose stone. The skulkers slouch back to the quarry, to be blotted out by the grey fumes from the hole. Carnac curses them from his boulder, and dozes again.

. . . . . .

"*Cré nom!* how the canaille impose upon your good nature, Monsieur Carnac! André would flay them with his whip!" A short, fat convict wheeled a barrow along a plank, rested on the handles stealthily, and wiped his round hairless face. The surveillant frowned and looked up.

"You must not speak to me, Chillon—I mean, One-nine-six. It is against the regulations."

"*Hélas!* I cannot help speaking." Chillon rested against the barrow and breathed hard. "The dogs impose upon you, Monsieur. It galls me to think that Monsieur is so lenient." Chillon straddled on

the barrow tenderly, as if he were resting against a charge of gunpowder. The surveillant frowned again.

Chillon bent forward confidentially. "This ship will bring you letters, Monsieur, letters from home!"

The surveillant shifted his eye about the sixteenth part of an inch. He did not speak, and Chillon sighed. "I knew your mother in Marseilles, Monsieur. I knew the little shop she kept near the Canébière."

He placed his hand across his stomach and shook his head. "I used to buy milk from your mother, Monsieur. *Hélas!* I have not tasted such milk for years; it was sweeter than butter, thick and full of cream. Have you forgotten that milk, Monsieur Carnac?"

The surveillant bent his head and stared at the lizards that flashed under the hot stones. The droning voice continued.

"There were your little brothers—Pierre, Léon, and Émile with the curls—little Émile that I used to toss up and down and ride on my boot. I never dreamed that his big brother would watch over me at Nouvelle with a gun." A large tear trickled down the fat convict's nose.

Surveillant Carnac sighed. The peeping lizards under the hot stones interested him. Chillon eyed him furtively, and slowly, very slowly, seated himself on the handle of the barrow, with the corner of his eye turned to the cliff-edge, where a hostile warder might be expected at any moment.

"You were born at Marseilles, Monsieur?"

"At Marseilles!" echoed the surveillant.

"Marseilles," said Chillon warmly, "is the finest seaport in Europe. How happy I have been in Marseilles, spending my money at your mother's little milk shop. A franc a day I have spent in gingerbreads and milk alone."

Chillon was now fairly seated on the barrow, and he took a sudden opportunity to swing his short legs. He had never been in Marseilles, but he had a knack of collecting information. He continued swinging his legs.

"Would you believe it, Monsieur Carnac, I have not tasted tobacco this month."

"Tobacco!" thundered the surveillant. "I should say not! Do not let me catch you with tobacco." He slapped his rifle and stamped his iron heel on the stone with amazing ferocity.

Then he thrust his finger into his pocket, whipped out a handkerchief, and rubbed at a speck on the breech of his rifle. A small cake of tobacco fell unobserved to the stones. Chillon closed an eye, stooped forward, snapped it between his finger and thumb, and placed it inside his hardened cheek.

The surveillant's eye was fixed intently on the steamer moving into the Grande Rade towards the Quai de la Transportation; perhaps he was thinking of Émile with the curls, and of the stout little mother who sold the milk.

The surf crashed against the near foreland; a stream of pebbles cluttered over the flat rock-floor of the gap. Carnac raised his head and listened; a hoarse voice cracked discordantly from the main

quarry. The sweating gangs humped their shoulders and waited.

"Stand up, you dog! I'll straighten your cursed back; I would smash your sulky head if it were dark!"

A rifle-butt banged viciously against the trucks. Chillon turned the tobacco in his cheek and spat across his barrow. "*Tiens!* that is André's voice, Monsieur Carnac. How he loves Jean Barradas!"

"Jean Barradas!" The surveillant turned half sullenly. "Did he not come to La Nouvelle a year before you, Chillon? They say you knew him in Paris?"

"Not much, Monsieur Carnac. He was a doctor. *Cré nom!* he lived in a Bastille of a house, and kept servants. I knew him, ah, yes, just a little! I do not know what crime he is innocent of. We are all innocent—even I never picked a pocket. Barradas will not speak of his past; it is not safe to press a man like Jean to speak of his past."

The surveillant frowned. "His crime was enormous. The papers were full of it. He was mobbed in the streets when he was arrested. What! a man who tries to sell his country should die!"

"Some said he was innocent, did they not, Monsieur?" Chillon nursed his ankle luxuriously and threw his head aside.

"Holy innocence!" jeered the surveillant. "Plans of the frontier were found in his house. What business has one with plans of the frontier? He should die!"

Chillon wagged his head diplomatically and was

silent. The surveillant regarded him with sudden interest. "You are a small thief. What business took you into the house of Barradas? Did he want friends so badly that he chose you for a comrade?"

Chillon glanced at the surveillant reproachfully. "No, Monsieur; his coachman was one of my friends—that was all. Barradas was a very good doctor; and people came even from England to let him touch them."

A black-whiskered surveillant approached them round the corner of the cliff; his scowling face half turned.

"Take care!" hissed Carnac under his breath.

Chillon leapt to his feet, saluted, and trundled his barrow along the plank that led to the trucks. André scowled at him as he passed. The pier was on his left; another gang was working underneath amongst the piles. The *thud! thud!* of the drivers reached him. Axes gleamed in the bands of sunshine that fell from the chinks overhead. Sweating warders stood off in boats, cursing l'Ile Nou, the convicts, and the blinding glare on the water. A derrick creaked and jarred as it swung dusty bags of nickel ore into a lighter alongside the pier.

Chillon pushed his barrow to where the trucks awaited their loads from the main quarry, and emptied his insignificant load in the sand.

A swarthy, clean-shaven convict was stooping in the last truck, packing and wedging boulders along the sides. His skin was burnt to the colour of an Arab's; sweat streamed from his throat and temples; his lips were clenched as if he feared that

some tell-tale whimper might escape them. At times the boyish surveillant in the rear would lean on his rifle and watch the strong, shapely hands clutching impossible weights, and the kindly eyes burning under the broad forehead. He could not help contrasting this labouring Hercules with the villainous horde around him.

Chillon trundled his barrow under the lee of the trucks, and suddenly discovered that something was wrong with his wheel. He knelt in the sand and picked up a stone to drive the spindle back. His face was upturned to the swarthy convict in the truck.

"Jean! Jean Barradas! How goes it? This way?"

The labouring giant made no sign or response to Chillon's quavering address; he swung his boulders into dovetailed corners; his jacket was torn at the breast where the sharp edges had bitten. A flock of gulls cried out, wheeling seaward in the wake of the slowly incoming steamer.

"Ah, Jean! Jean! why did you meddle with politics?" Chillon took his tobacco from his mouth, looked at it severely, and put it back again. Warders shouted to each other from the pier, and the gurgle of the tide half drowned the stroke of a ship's bell. Chillon leaned against the truck hammering his refractory wheel with a stone.

"There is no hope for you, Jean—no hope! I have sounded here and sounded there, but no man in Nouméa will sell you a boat. Therefore I give you up."

"Why?" Jean Barradas did not cease in his

labour. The sweat filled the hollows of his cheek and smeared the block of stone between his knees. "Why do you give me up?" His voice was steady. He looked over Chillon's head to the reef beyond which lay the grey levels of the Pacific Ocean.

"Because you are too much watched, my friend. I give you up. Now with Magnier and Sarsot I may get away—Sarsot is a carpenter and a *libéré;* he builds boats and he is friendly with me. I mentioned you; I took him aside. 'Barradas can raise the francs,' says I to Sarsot. 'Barradas!' says he. 'I will have nothing to do with that man. He has an enemy in Nouméa. Think twice, *mon* Chillon!' says he. 'Let Barradas alone.'"

Chillon blinked and humped his shoulders. "Jean! you have a big devil of an enemy somewhere."

Jean Barradas jerked back his head after the manner of a lashed steer. "It is true. I have an enemy, Chillon, somewhere—I know not where. You are wise to abandon me. Sleeping or waking, I am watched. Join Magnier and Sarsot; you may reach Australia. I wish you well."

He spoke hurriedly, with his head down, his hands groping blindly amongst the jagged boulders at the truck bottom. All men agreed that he had an enemy. Who could the enemy be? This persistent malice must have originated from some forgotten event in his life. His memory groped back to his earliest years, balancing the good and evil he had done, and striving to remember some man or woman he might have unwittingly wronged. He recalled his schoolfellows and judged them one by one, analysing his boyish quarrels to see if he had sown a

seed or left a sting in any young mind that might rankle till manhood. He could remember none. There was Imaun Pasha. . . . The scene of the duel came back vividly—the grey sky over the Bois. Imaun was lying on the wet grass under the dripping trees, a pistol smoking at his elbow. He remembered kneeling beside the Pasha and holding his hand. Imaun had looked into his face; he had seen anger, regret, but not malice. Besides, Imaun was dead.

Jean stood in the middle of the truck with the fierce, level sun in his eyes, gripping a slab of rock that was shaped like a tombstone. "Who would be my enemy? Who would send an innocent man to La Nouvelle? I did not think myself worthy of so much hate." He flung the stone into the corner of the truck and stood motionless, conning the problem that had been with him night and day for nine years.

The gulls circled inshore. Two convicts pushed a truck over the rails to the end of the sea-wall. The truck opened, rattling tons of stone into the blue. A bell clanged; a screw of gun-smoke was carried over the prison-island; the boats shot out from the pier, and the first of the labouring gangs pulled away across the narrow strip of water towards the gaol. A hoarse voice called out across the quarry. Barradas did not heed; his swarthy face was turned to the west, where Australia lay.

Surveillant André stalked under the cliff, a snarl on his lips, his fingers clenched over the breech of his rifle. "You again! Skulking dog! Spy! Watch yourself!"

Jean flinched, but remained immovable, his blistered hands shading his eyes. The sun had touched the horizon, and he half expected it to strike the ocean like the sound of a gong.

Chillon was still busily mending his wheel.

CHAPTER II

DISPLAYS THE PERENNIAL CHARM OF AN AUTUMNAL ACQUAINTANCE

A NEW day broke over Nouméa as Calphurnia's lean-hulled yacht swung round in the swell from the passage. Twenty glasses scanned her from the fort; a single gun boomed from the east wall of the prison, scattering the gulls that drowsed above it.

Surveillant Carnac, doing sentry duty, nursed his rifle dejectedly; his eye wandered from the yacht to the line of dismal sand-humps that dotted the beach below. Two hammer-nosed sharks cruised in the green shallows. Half a dozen kanakas shouted a warning from the reef-end to the other boys hauling in their nets beyond the rib of surf.

Carnac sloped his rifle and sighed. A brown mass moved under the lee of the prison wall, and as it slouched through the spiked entrance he heard the clink of fetters. The gate swung back; a flood of sunshine streamed in and lit up the jagged line of bayonets. *Tramp! tramp! tramp!* The brown mass moved along the naked road on its way to the boats. One tall figure leaned from the mass to where the sun was belting the east with saffron. Surveillant Carnac became interested, and chuckled softly when the figure raised a threatening fist to the sea and sky. A bell clanged monotonously, and across the

sullen fort the shadows lengthened as the sun climbed up and up from the naked east to torture the earth anew. Carnac remembered that he was hungry, and that it was a long time to breakfast.

The guard changed. Carnac stretched himself joyously, whistled a bar from "Madame Angot," and sauntered to the mess-room, where fifteen brother surveillants were seated at *déjeuner*.

The fifteen greeted him hilariously. "Did you see the millionaire's yacht, *mon* Carnac?"

"She's inside the breakwater," answered the sentry. "A pretty toy to bring to such a hell-hole as Nouméa. What is her business, I wonder?"

"Pleasure, *mon* Carnac! This rich Australian woman would cross three oceans to dance with the officers of La Nouvelle, and the officers of La Nouvelle are pigs to a man—awake, asleep, drunk, or sober, they are pigs!" The speaker was a sullen, black-whiskered man with enormous hands; he spoke with conviction.

"Bravo, André! But why does this rich woman come to La Nouvelle so often? Two, three, four times she has been here in seven years. Not to dance, surely; she cannot walk without a crutch, and she swears frightfully. Oh, no! she does not come here to dance. One foot is in the grave; she would not put the other in a minuet."

"She has a marriageable daughter," laughed another, "and the commandant has a son."

"Bah, this Australian woman treats him like a dog, and sneers at M. Jules's bandy legs. There must be another attraction."

"She is in love with a convict, *mon* Carnac!"

Everybody but Carnac looked up and laughed at the speaker. Carnac ate steadily.

"Do you not think it possible that a woman can love a convict? Let me tell you there are some fine gentlemanly fellows in 'A' gang—politicians, pickpockets, and educated burglars. Two men in our lot would pass in any society—Jean Barradas and Auguste Mercier. Barradas you all know—Prussian spy! Some say he was not guilty. We know better, do we not? He tried to sell the army; he earned transportation. Mercier is a mystery; but he is here, and that is enough."

"Do you mean to say that this Australian woman is in love with either of these men?" Carnac, nearing repletion, stretched out his hands and laughed.

"Well, *mon vieux*, this woman has the reputation of having once loved a negro slave in Egypt; she purchased him from the Emperor of Egypt and treated him like a lover. I heard the commandant say so. Her name is Lady Royal. Pass the rolls!"

"Where has André gone?" growled Carnac.

"He went out to look at the yacht," said one.

"Yes," said Carnac; "he knows more about that yacht than he will tell. I believe he was on board when she came last."

And a very little distance away, behind a bluff which hid him from the fort, André was doing strange things with a handkerchief. Nine times he raised and lowered it, and waited till a speck of white had gleamed nine times from the yacht's stern. Two years before the signal number had been seven; the progress was a pleasant fancy of Calphurnia's.

André lit a cigar with the air of a man who has settled a piece of business to his satisfaction.

The tall, thin man in uniform who had answered his signals disappeared from the deck and went below, dropping a word of order to his lascar lieutenant on the way. He bent his steps to the saloon which filled the after part of the vessel, and tapped so lightly on the gong at the entrance that it seemed as if he were deprecating anger at his intrusion. The dumb Nubian girl appeared and nodded, and the tall man followed within. He walked to the centre of the apartment and waited, his feet shifting, his hands moving hither and thither as if he were continually searching his pockets for something he could not find. His face was thin and sallow, his thick hair nearly grey; his lustreless eyes seemed always staring at something on the horizon.

From the room in which the tall man stood opened at each side cool passages screened with hangings of wine-red silk. The magic floor gave no sound in response to his shuffling feet; he felt himself shut in by silence. As he watched, a door opened, and the dumb girl's finger beckoned.

He moved forward and was suddenly conscious of innumerable perfumes. An oval chamber appeared before him, shrouded in purple mist. A dozen crescent-shaped globes seemed to drench the atmosphere with shaded light. Behind and around him were squatting ivory mandarins and strange bronze gods. A thin jet of water spurted from a ceiling of inlaid shells, and the tiny stream was caught by a brimming conch set in a vase of dazzling white sand;

the sound of the spray fell on his ears like globules of melody. In the centre of the chamber was the ship-coffin, and in its hold still lay the placid Imaun. Beyond, upon a low divan, crouched Calphurnia.

Calphurnia's eyelids dropped like moth-wings; the cheeks were drawn and livid; but the tall man saw only the mouth that was like a blood-stain on the face of a corpse. She leaned over to laugh a welcome.

"He will come this evening," said the tall man, submissively.

Calphurnia took no notice of his words.

"Captain Delisle returns! Ah, Delisle!" she said, "if God had given thee a squint, or a hump like a pyramid, I could not love thee more. Come near me, Delisle, or Tam will creep out and pinch thee!"

The tall man looked round with a sudden loathing in his eyes. "Is that devil here? You could spare me that at least, Calphurnia!"

She chuckled over him in childish glee. "Our admiral is not well. Laugh! laugh! or I will call Tam to hold thee in his arms." At her words a screen moved behind the divan; the dwarf's head lolled absurdly over it as though the neck had been broken.

The tall man saw, and the cunning realism of the movement filled him with abhorrence. He groaned. "Why do you permit him to torture me?"

Calphurnia made a sign, and the gaping head disappeared with a jerk. "Imaun would have laughed," she said pettishly; "but you shrink as

though Tam were a Pharaoh's mummy come to life. You smoke too much, Delisle; and yet you remain a novice. Opium is like music. At first you wallow in coarse sensations. By and by you climb up, up, until you reach the sublime pinnacles where the goddesses live who are like me, and the gods—who are not like you!"

"It is not so with me," muttered Delisle, kneeling before her. "Surely I began in the lowest hell, and I am still descending."

"Patience! Patience!" she mumbled persuasively. "You will become exalted in time. Then you will live. Do the Things still haunt your sleep?" she asked with sudden malice.

His face blanched at her question. "Ugh! Why do you ask . . . you know . . ." His shoulders cowered and sank as though a millstone were crushing him from above. "Night after night I suffer torture. A black bog stretching as far as I can see. No sky above me—can you understand it, Calphurnia?"

"Understand?" She leaned forward anxiously. "Yes. You have lived in etherless space, where the fixed suns glow through Infinity. Ha! your vision is keening. But . . . the Things?" She lay on her elbows watching him.

He wiped the moist agony from his face. "I will smoke no more!" His hoarse voice broke into a wail. "No more! no more! Why should I . . . to be haunted with horrors. . . . Three shapeless Things crawling towards me over a bog, where my body is driven like a stake in the mud. I cannot move . . . only wait and watch them crawling,

crawling. Some night they will get me. . . . Calphurnia, do you hear? I will smoke no more!"

Calphurnia's laugh reached the highest octave of contempt. "Some she-ape has defiled your drug with pepper, or maybe it was grown on a pariah's grave. Such things happen. I, even I, suffer. Yet there is the joy of knowing that I suffer differently, am exalted differently. To animals and men Time is a narrow plank stretching in one direction—to the future. To me it is the broadest highway crossed by a million lanes; and I traverse them all —all!"

She stretched out her hands, locking them together; her eyes glazed, a pallor overspread her face as though she had suddenly received a wound.

"The sea creeps into my dreams now, all green and fleshy—a monster with white lips that rolls outward to devour the sun. Once I could stay it with my hand; now it has grown into a relentless Beast eating into the universe. Sometimes it catches me on a naked rock where there is no one in the world but myself to scream and wring my hands at the emptiness. Down, down in the hollow of Infinity I see the suffocated sun—a celestial cinder fanned to its final spark by the everlasting winds. Ah, it is frightful to be the last, the last of All!"

She trembled on her divan, writhing in her silken dress like Grief in a shroud. A shadowy Shape seemed to move in her eyes, and the man beside her looked deep into them and knew it as the comrade of that in his own, the shadow of eternal Fear.

CHAPTER III

CONTAINS THE REMINISCENCES OF MAHMUD THE SINGER

Two lascar rowers pulled from the yacht to a sheltered beach under the lee of the prison island. The sentry on the wall stooped forward and grinned pleasantly. It was his business to fire his rifle at any boat that stirred, after dark, within gunshot of the fort. Upon this occasion he fired a cheroot instead, and blew the fragrant smoke into the still, hot air. His pockets were stuffed with money enough to keep him in cheroots for the rest of his life; therefore he closed his eyes when André slunk over the black-sand beach to the waiting boat.

André seated himself in the stern, nodded to the rowers, and lay back in the cushions.

A green light burned at the yacht's fore peak, her narrow hull stooped gently to the tide. The mainland town winked with many lamps; there was no sound from the walls above them, no alarm from the iron muzzles in the embrasures. A single cough reached them from the sentry—a friendly cough, meant to encourage.

The lascars rowed leisurely. One of them looked in the direction of the prison and thrust out his tongue. Presently André shifted his helm and brought the dinghy with a round sweep under the

yacht's stern. Half a dozen more lascars sprawled along the bulwarks, watching them keenly as they made the brass-railed gangway.

"Ahoy! Tell captain he comes!" A soft voice passed the word along the deck; a moment later the tall figure of Delisle wavered up from below and met the black-whiskered warder. His hands twitched nervously; his eyes seemed everywhere as he said, "Lady Royal is not ready. You will have to wait."

André muttered unintelligible words and flung himself across a transom, his feet drawn together, his chin down as if he were prepared to wait a hundred years. From the corner of his eyes he surveyed the decks, the firm, delicate yards, the white-clad shapes that flitted hither and thither. Delisle hesitated up and down the narrow poop, and finally went below.

André drummed his fingers on the rail; he was alert and full of wonder at the strange things he saw. Somewhere in the shadow of the deckhouse sat a group of lascars: from their jargon of English, French, and Hindustani he caught now and again a word.

"Delisle sahib does not like this thing, O serang! I heard him complain to the woman Calphurnia, and, B'-ismillahi! she struck him with her bent crutch."

"Mahmud," said a voice, "thou art a son of an ass."

"Serang, by my head there were others who saw," protested the invisible Mahmud. "I speak truly, serang, and no man out of Asia knows Calphurnia better than I—Mahmud the Singer. Was I not a

news writer? Did I not receive gold for the things written concerning her?"

The serang coughed incredulously, and beat the deck with his naked feet. "I have heard that thou wast in her service when she met Delisle sahib."

"No, no, serang! I was in the service of Delisle sahib at Calcutta. That was long ago, when the young sahib was a writer in a shipping company. In those days I was his friend and brother, because he was without a wife and lonely. Delisle sahib was without friends. The memsahibs passed him as if he were a pariah. Sometimes the river pilot looked into his bungalow, after dark, and smoked with him and called him fool. This was very mysterious to me, serang, because I had never seen man enter his house by the front—they climbed like thieves over his compound wall. It was very mysterious. I could not understand why young Delisle sahib had lost caste, why men turned their heads from him in the public gardens where the memsahibs drive and talk nonsense. But one morning a little ship came up the river, and I saw the Lady Calphurnia standing on the bridge talking with the captain sahib; pointing here and there, laughing, sneering at little things that caught her eye. It was the first time I had ever seen her, serang, and she was smoking a cigarette in the eyes of the world. She was not then as she is now—I speak of many years ago. Her hair was the colour of a lion's mane and stood out from her head; her eyes were more brilliant than the opal of our temple in Benares. W'Allah! they should have called her Hawa instead of the Beast of Delhi."

Mahmud spat into the darkness; there was no sound from his audience. The soft voice continued.

"The little ship tied up, and soon after a carriage drove from the wharf and through the gardens. The white memsahibs peeped at Calphurnia from the open shutters. Men came from the hotels and stood in the road as she dashed by. And yet no one uttered a sneer or gibe; there was no man, red-coat or black-coat, that did not stand back and sweat when she looked his way. Well they knew she could say things that would shame them before their wives and set the world laughing from Brahmaputra to Thames. I followed her carriage, serang, and by Allah, the Glorious, the Wise, it stopped at the bungalow of Delisle sahib. I was seized with a fit; my knees knocked. It was then I saw why he was outcast—he had permitted the Woman to enter his house, the Woman who had been with yellow devils beyond the Great Wall. All India knew that she had tempted the Maharajah of Jeypore. It was said that she had danced naked before the hill-princes; but they stopped her at Cabul. W'Allah! the Amir would have none of her tricks; he packed her with an escort back to the English. This was the woman who visited Delisle sahib. No wonder that the memsahibs spoke not to him!"

Mahmud paused to glance apprehensively towards the stairs. The slight sound was not repeated, and he continued:

"O serang, I used to lie under his window and watch her sitting before him, dressed like a sultan, with the fires of a hundred diamonds burning about

throat and hands. Delisle sahib would lie at her feet drinking in the music of her voice. Truly, she was not then what she is now; she was beautiful beyond all women in the world, and the magic of her speech won the heart of every man who heard it. She had a voice of magic, serang, and Delisle sahib was bewitched. She taught him to smoke and to sing to her lewd songs until he made her laugh like the wicked djins she is.

"Then she would go away in her little ship and India would forget her. The pilot-men and the hussar sahibs would come again over the wall to smoke and drink the wines that the she-djins had left in Delisle's house. For weeks he would sit in the dark bungalow eating his food as if he were about to die, until the woman's spell had worn off. Sometimes he opened his desk and took out a bundle of letters, and read them sullenly; then he would cast himself on the bed writhing like a tormented shape in Jahanam.

"One day a big ship came up the river, and Delisle sahib told me to drive to the wharf. We reached the ship just as those who came were leaving. Delisle sahib stood near the gangway, staring at the white memsahibs hurrying this way and that. 'Have you seen Miss Vanburgh?' said he to an officer-man. 'Sir,' said the officer-man, 'here is Miss Vanburgh.'

"Serang, I saw a girl-child come up and fling herself at his feet. 'My dear! my dear!'—That was all she said; and she wept. Allah Karim! her face was sweet to look upon; her hair was spun gold red and yellow, as if it had been drawn from

the sun's eye. Her feet were smaller than your hand, serang. Shall I ever forget how she kissed him!—I who had seen him lip to lip with the Beast of Delhi!

"Serang, that night they were married; yes, married, and Delisle sahib became another man. He broke the red pipe that smelt of opium, and the little bungalow rang with laughter. We had games at the garden-end, and the little memsahib would cover his eyes with silk, and he would hunt for her among the tamarisk and the deep grass. Ah, serang, no man could forget those days!

"One night Delisle sahib was smoking under the trees where he could see the curtains and the lighted room beyond. The voice of the little memsahib was singing; she was singing an ayah's baby-song; I forget the words, serang, but it sounded very sweet. I was snuggling in the grass at Delisle sahib's elbow, and the smell of the hot dust in the leaves brought back a thought of my home in the Punjaub. It was very dark: a strange red moon climbed out of the Hoogli and showed the yellow waves licking over the sand-bars down the bend. Delisle sahib's eye followed every turn of the little woman indoors. I have not forgotten her tunes, I taught them to my wife Kadiza: I had begun to think of her when Delisle sahib caught my elbow. It was then I heard the creak of wheels in the road that led from the Hoogli. Delisle sahib's cigar went out; he trembled like a sick man. 'Mahmud,' said he, 'thou knowest wheel-noises, hast thou heard that sound before?'

"O serang, I was afraid to answer. The carriage

had stopped opposite the bungalow. We heard a voice. The young sahib stood up and spoke a hot word I did not understand. Then he sat down with his face to the window.

"The memsahib was stitching some little baby's clothes, and looking ever to the garden, and the lamp-glow whitened her face. She too had heard the sound outside. Then we heard Soma who spoke of a visitor. Was it love or instinct that made the memsahib so white, serang? We saw her move backwards like a child who sees an evil thing, and she stood holding the window-sill. The sahib pinned my wrist, and I saw what he saw—the Beast of Delhi standing at the door, spying and smiling strangely at the little memsahib.

"'Where is Delisle? Where is Walter?' She stood still and smiled in a way that brought fear to me. Serang, she was dressed in all the splendour of Asia. Never was there a he-djins or she-djins that carried the pearls of so many seas; she wore diamonds that gave out sparks of rose and green, and some that burned with dull, festering yellow rays. It seemed as if she owned the jewels of Paradise; it seemed as if she had just leaped from a star!

"'Tell the master I am here!' she said; 'tell him that Calphurnia is here!' The little memsahib shrank as a heifer shrinks under the lash.

"'Why do you want my husband?' She made a step from the window: we could see her trembling. My heart was beating fast, serang; I felt that I saw strange things. And Calphurnia lifted her chin and laughed—a strange sweet laugh, serang, until her white throat rippled.

"'What do I want with your husband? Listen!' She stooped and whispered into the memsahib's ear. Until that moment I had thought the memsahib a baby. Quick as thought she took a knife from the wall, and dashed at Calphurnia. Calphurnia seized her wrist and turned it, and the knife fell on the floor.

"The memsahib fell backward. 'Oh, you bad woman!' Serang, we heard the words down in the garden. I think all India must have heard those words.

"'Am I bad,' said Calphurnia, 'because I want him? Has he never told you about me? Shall I tell you who I am?' She turned her sneering face about the room until her eyes fell on the baby-clothes in the chair. And she snapped at these with the quick pounce of a tigress. 'Ha, little White-Face, you are counting your chickens? That is unlucky!'

"The little memsahib stood bravely, but her face grew whiter. 'Go away, bad woman! he is mine, mine! Go away, or I will shame you through the streets of Calcutta. Yes, I have heard of you; I have seen shameless images of you in the bazaar. You tempted my husband; and may God forgive you!—but now he is mine!' It was in my thought that the little memsahib desired to cry, serang, but love and fear held her dry-eyed. 'Leave my house! leave us in peace!' she said.

"Calphurnia sat down and laughed. 'This house is mine, little White-Face. These chairs and tables, the very roof that keeps out the rains, are mine. I bought them for him. I have kissed him in this

room and listened to his vows. It is strange he never mentioned you, never breathed your name! Fie, little White-Face, let us talk like women!'

"Serang, I know why Delisle sahib did not go up to the room and kill her; his heart was soft with women-folk, and he could not shake off the spell that was in her eyes. But his body trembled; his teeth made a strange noise.

"'Let us talk like women,' said Calphurnia. She took a pair of dice from her pocket, rattling them in the palm of her hand. Delisle sahib crept nearer to catch the words that came at the end of her wicked laugh. 'Let us throw for him, little White-Face! Let us toss these across the table, and the highest thrower takes the man. If I win you must go from India. He will soon forget you. He was mine long ago; have I not an equal right to him? Watch me, little White-Face; all India will not keep him from me if I throw high!'

"I had crept close to the window, serang, and when the dice rolled from her hand I saw her eyes gleam, and she said 'Eleven!' The little memsahib was very white; a strange light burned in her eyes; she turned toward the garden one moment, and it is in my thought that she was praying.

"Calphurnia laughed. 'Throw you and deliver up the keys of thy household. He is won; never have I thrown so well!' She gathered up the dice as quickly as a conjurer, and gave them to the little memsahib. 'Throw for your life and your babe. Throw!'

"The memsahib looked at her steadily; her lips moved, her hand shut and opened, and the dice left

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"Calphurnia seized her wrist and turned it"

them, spinning fairly across the table. Calphurnia jumped back, snapping savagely, for by the name of the Merciful the memsahib had thrown twelve!

"The memsahib was shaking like a leaf; but she stepped to the door and flung it open. 'Keep your word, woman, and go! If thou comest again, then——'

"Calphurnia lit a cigarette and smiled. 'What then?' she said softly.

"The memsahib stiffened before her. 'I have a knife for myself and you; so keep your foot from my threshold. Begone, you tigress!'

"Calphurnia moved to the door and looked back wickedly. 'You have the luck of a Celestial. Keep your man if you can! He will come to me again. He will cross the seas to find me out; he will leave you and your brat. So be it!'

"She passed from our sight, and we heard the rattling of the carriage that bore her away.

"That night I found two pair of dice on the carpet, serang; and one pair was loaded. Calphurnia had dropped them while handing another pair to the memsahib. And yet the bad woman had lost. Allah is very good, serang."

The serang sighed. "But Calphurnia spoke truly, Mahmud: Delisle sahib followed her to Australia."

Mahmud the Singer laughed. "The greater fool he! Her love for him was but a passing lust, serang. Do you not see that she treats him like a dog? She cannot love, and yet they say she once loved Imaun Pasha, whose dead body Khusra Buksh hath seen at the bottom of a little ship."

"Khusra Buksh is a liar!" snorted the serang. "Tamerlane sahib will surely throttle him some day; but I have heard of the Pasha. He was a friend of the Khedive. I myself have heard her scream out his name: he is dead; he was slain in the Frenchmen's city called Paris."

André stirred uneasily. The word Paris had pricked him. He shook himself from reverie and glanced back at the winking lights of Nouméa. A sudden fear seized him, a fear that he might be caught. If it were discovered that he had visited the yacht he might be sent to dig and blast with the very gang he cursed at every day.

Mahmud's story had fallen dully upon his ear: he had not understood. Only Calphurnia interested him, Calphurnia and Jean Barradas. If he could squeeze enough money out of her he would leave Nouméa; yet he loved his occupation. There were men in his gang whom he hated; and it was sweet to him to see them labouring in the quarries, to see their bleeding hands and starting eyes. Jean Barradas was one of them. It was such pleasure to torture Barradas, even if he were not paid for it.

The yacht swung her nose to the incoming tide. A far-off bell struck nine. André glanced at his watch and grunted impatiently. The din of a gong sounded below; there was a scampering of white shapes. Delisle's lean length came hesitatingly before him.

"Take off your hat, Monsieur Gaoler, and follow me!"

André followed him down the brass-lined stairs into an oblong state-room that glittered and re-

flected a hundred swinging Cupids in the panelled mirrors. The Biscayan warder stood erect on the velvet carpet, his stiff hands at his sides, his brutish head thrown back. Delisle left him.

Suddenly the hangings parted at the end of the saloon. A white-haired woman limped out and lit a cigarette before she looked up. The black-whiskered warder suppressed a grunt of astonishment as she adjusted her monocle. Hitherto he had dealt with her subordinates only. She reminded him of a grey owl pictured in a child's book. He wondered why people were so foolish as to be afraid of her—even the commandant. But she would not hoodwink Pierre André!

"What is your name?" she lisped.

"Pierre André." He answered loudly, his head well back, his short fingers ploughing in the black tangle of his beard.

"Ha!" She measured him in a shift of her eye and nodded. "Pierre André! master of the hounds! Sit down, André; I will keep you five minutes." He obeyed gingerly.

She addressed him again in French. "From time to time my agents have sent you money. What have you done for it?" She pinched the cigarette between her thumb and finger. The monocle fell over her flat breast. André locked his stiff hands around his knee and thrust out his big jowl.

"I have worked Barradas in the quarries, madam, until he has turned sick. I have seen the stones cut his breast. I have stopped his food, robbed him of his books. He has been flogged without reason. I can do no more. I dare not."

Calphurnia shrugged her hollow shoulders, breathed out a thin line of smoke, and coughed. "Is that your idea of punishment, Pierre?" she lisped.

The warder tried to meet her eye, and flinched. He rapped an oath to give himself courage. "*Cré Dieu!* I cannot maim him; I dare not. I have tempted him to strike me: he will not strike. He is patient and learned. Last year he cured a blind warder—the man could not see a wall before him, now he reads signals out at sea. That man is grateful to Barradas and watches me. There are other men on the island who sympathise with the dog. I dare not go too far. If you want him strangled or guillotined, madam, why——"

"You are childish, Pierre!" said Calphurnia pettishly. "Never spill blood!" She pitched away her cigarette, and turned her sneering face towards him. "I am tiring of this play. The punishment is too regular; his body will accustom itself to your abuses. I will take him away; you shall help me!"

The warder started up, shaking his coarse head. "I do not understand, madam. You will not be allowed to take a prisoner from La Nouvelle. I could not, I dare not think——"

She stamped her foot. "Do not practise your crude diplomacy on me. I will not waste time fencing with a bear. I will not bargain. Your price, man, your price for getting him away? Quick! and, above all, no hypocrisy!"

Pierre André quailed before the jewelled claw that struck the air right and left at every word.

"What shall I do, madam? How is this thing to be done?"

"Buy a boat and put such things in her as I shall provide. Let him escape. Bribe! and bribe well! I do not fear your government. Find a place; hide the boat under the rocks. Let him see it. Throw out hints and he will get away; ay, he will get away!"

"And the money—the price?" ventured André.

She struck a gong sharply. A huge head peeped from the curtain folds. Tamerlane the dwarf came forward like Joss from his stool and dropped a steel box at Calphurnia's feet. She signed to him to unlock it, to thrust a packet of gold into the warder's fist. The gong sounded again; and Tamerlane vanished as Delisle's timorous shape appeared in the passage.

"Send this man ashore!" she snapped.

Delisle bent his head and escorted the gaoler on deck.

Ten nights later a dim sail cut across by Pointe Mä, tacked skilfully; and made for the Passe de Ouitoé. If the sentry on the point saw, he made no sign. The dim sail fluttered and was lost in blackness.

CHAPTER IV

TELLS WHAT HAPPENED ON A JOURNEY TO THE LAND OF BOUNDING KANGAROOS, BY THE ROAD OF A WOMAN'S HATE

Jean Barradas sat calmly at the tiller, with an eye on the stiffening boom and the freshening seas that drenched their tiny jib. Chillon gradually lost his fear. He braced himself against the mast and rolled a cigarette. "*Vive l'Australie!*" he said under his breath. "*Vive l'Australie!*" He shook his fist at the prison island. "Adieu, La Nouvelle!" Hatred turned his whisper into speech.

A line of slavering breakers caught them like an arm and flung the boat within an oar's length of the rocks of l'Ile Ténia. Barradas rammed his helm hard a-port when the sudden breeze struck them a moment later, driving them beyond the gap into the deep swell of the Pacific.

"If this wind holds, *mon* Jean, we shall sight the bounding kangaroos within thirty days. *Vivent les Kangourous!*" Jean's head was thrown back, but his swarthy face betrayed none of his companion's elation; his eye was fixed on the treacherous seas ahead.

The faint sky-line appeared closer to them now; the tumbling seas seemed to waver and recoil in great heaps from the tiny shell that skipped from

crest to crest, nosing the hollows and getting slapped. The lights of Nouméa made a luminous blur behind them; then that too disappeared, and they were alone with the stars.

Chillon looked back over the stern; sighed; smiled; and laughed. Barradas took no notice; and Chillon stretched himself boisterously. Then he ventured to hum a snatch of song—

"Oui, mon départ est arrêté;
Je vais vivre loin de tes charmes,
Et n'en suis pas plus attristé. . . ."

"Be quiet!" said Barradas sharply. Chillon put on a reproachful look, unseen in the darkness; but was silent. At the end of half an hour he stirred restlessly.

"Not so loud, then," said Jean. And Chillon sang again—

"Je crois bien que, de ton côté,
Tu n'en verseras point de larmes. . . ."

But Chillon's voice was not a light one; it rumbled sonorously from his deep chest with the musical strength of a bassoon. He repeated his verse, chanting the first lines in rich mockery, in the spirit of the pavement Bacchanals of Paris; but with the last lines he stood up and held out despairing hands towards l'Ile Nou so passionately, so tragically, that Jean Barradas for a moment looked at him in wonder.

"Perhaps you are not very sorry to go, Antoine?"

Chillon smiled.

"Thirty days will see us eating bananas on the Australian coast, Jean, where bananas grow on every tree. I shall stay there. I shall settle down inland and marry a soft-hearted little chuck that I can beat when I am not well."

He paused reflectively. "Did you ever beat a woman, Jean? Did you ever knead soft, plump flesh between your fists? *Nom d'un chien!* it is sublime! I used to beat Jeanne Mardrus, who lived at Fontainebleau. Her father was an ill-bred chemist, but Mademoiselle Mardrus broke her heart for me. Ah! she used to steal her father's peppermints for Chillon, and Chillon used to beat her like a brother."

Jean hugged his helm silently. His brooding face scanned the darkness ahead. His companion's chatter was as uninteresting as the trickle of the bilge at the boat's bottom.

"It is supper-time, Jean; and I am hungry."

"Eat!" said Jean. "There is plenty."

The space between the thwarts had been closed and filled with a triple tier of tins—meat on one side, biscuits on the other. A ten-gallon cask of water stood at the foot of the mast. Chillon brought out some biscuits and a tin of meat—the first that came to hand.

"I wonder have they discovered?" he said. "We could not hear the gun now. We should have ten hours' start at least. And perhaps they will not search for us much; the Léonie is at the other side of the island. We timed it well, did we not?"

He ate and drank noisily. "Blessed be the man

who provisioned us, Jean; it must have cost five hundred francs at least. I thought you had an enemy somewhere, but he has changed to a fairy prince. Come, Jean, tell me the name of your benefactor."

"I know not," said his companion; "and I do not understand. André had a hand in it. But why? Yet one could not refuse. It is very strange."

Chillon ate his biscuit with his left hand resting on the third button of his waistcoat. He was recovering his spirits.

"This Australian meat stirs my good blood. I wish I had that Carnac here now; I would kick him with such pleasure. Have some, Jean!"

Barradas waved the proffered tin aside. "I thought Carnac was friendly with you?"

"No, my Jean; he merely permitted me to amuse him, and in return pitched me a sou's worth of vile tobacco. The beast had all the best of it. Some of the lies I told him were worth a hundred cigars at least. Apropos, I would like a cigar and a bottle of wine!"

"Lie down and sleep!" said Jean. "I will wake you after midnight. We must take turn and turn at the helm. Let us avoid ships; we want nothing, and there is danger of being picked up and sent back. Put away the food and sleep." Chillon obeyed meekly, and was soon snoring under a thick blanket at the bottom of the boat.

The darkness of the sea was profound. New Caledonia was no longer in the east, New Caledonia the hideous that had flayed the body of Jean Barradas and chained him to a wall like an animal. For

the thousandth time he brooded over the puzzle of his arrest and conviction, and found no solution. That such a fate should befall him of all men, striking like lightning from the blue. They had charged him with being a German spy; and the proofs were unmistakable. But who had invented these proofs? Whose diabolical malice had locked those plans in the safe of which he alone held the key? It had been useless to protest. People went mad at the very name of spy. The very children had run bleating at the sound of his name. Girls and mothers had spat upon him when the police had marched him into the court—because he had tried to sell France—he! An unseen fury had dogged his heels, tricking him inch by inch until he appeared as guilty as Bazaine.

And he had endured that hell for nearly ten years. He wondered what had become of Paul; what he was doing, where he lived. Perhaps he no longer lived; for ten years there was no word. Not a letter, not a sign. Yet maybe—his heart bounded—Paul's finger was in this escape. Or was it that the good God would no longer suffer such injustice? It might be that he would yet be allowed to find the enemy, the inscrutable foe who had wrecked his life. Jean's pulse thumped at the thought of a vengeance which should blot out all his sufferings. Some day that foe would blunder, would grow careless; and Jean would find him. His fist closed on the tiller as if squeezing a throat.

The land breeze had fallen away. The sea stretched like a dark carpet towards the wide rim of the west. Day dawned, and the boat came slowly

to sight like some vague bird that swims across the sky. Dusky lights crept over the expanse above; a ragged cloud smeared the track of the sun, and the water beneath trembled and reflected changing shadows until the whiteness behind them grew to gold.

"Awake!" said Jean; "it is day."

Chillon yawned, and looked at his knees and up at the sky and yawned again.

"Wash your face!" said Jean.

Chillon eyed him stupidly. "There is no dust on the high seas. *Mon Dieu!* what's the good of being superfluous?"

"Wash your hands and face!" Jean repeated it calmly.

Chillon grumbled forward, dipped his fingers into the ocean, and finally scooped up a little water and scoured his round, blinking, hairless face, drying it swiftly on his yellow neckcloth.

"Take the helm," said Jean, "and keep her due west. You will find she answers very easily."

"I'm hungry!" protested Chillon. "I must eat and keep up my spirits. Let me have breakfast first."

"I am in no hurry, Antoine. Eat, and eat plenty. There is enough food to last us three months."

Chillon finished the tin of meat and a heap of biscuits. He filled his pint pot from the cask and drank heartily. Then he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and blinked satisfaction. Jean gave him the helm. Chillon took out his flute and combined navigation with sweet melody.

West, due west, they sailed for ten days, grilling under a savage sun, drenched at midnight by slow heaving seas.

There were times when white squalls of rain half filled their boat and kept them baling with savage energy. Sometimes west and east were charged with hurricanes that threatened to overwhelm them.

Days of sun and days of wet skies filled the unending waters. Sometimes the sea would rise mournfully like an oppressed animal heaving its shoulders to the sullen clouds. Then night would come again, night that dropped warm rain through the moaning darkness, and the world was visible only at arm's length. Jean would look up from his crouching at the tiller and stare ahead with half-dreaming eyes, wondering if he were really on the sea, or sailing on a narrow stream bounded by an everlasting gulf.

At noon on the twelfth day a schooner-rigged vessel crossed their path. Chillon sprang to the sheet with a shout.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Jean.

"Do? *Cré Dieu!* can you not see that she is bound north? She may be going to China. She will pick us up! They see us. *Nom d'un nom d'un nom!* we are free! Let us put about and run up to her. Down with the sails!"

"Let go the rope!" thundered Jean. "Why should we go to China? How do you know where she is going? Mother of God! are you mad? Are we short of food that we must risk such a thing? Take your hand from the rope!"

The schooner held on her course. Escapes from New Caledonia were nothing to her.

Chillon flung himself down and sulked through the long afternoon. The wind, which had held steadily behind them, gradually dropped; the boom yawed and banged idly. Jean baled with a meat-tin; and in the aching silence each splash seemed like the echo of some louder explosion. A blood-red sun flared down to the hollow of the west. The sea glowed and reflected hues of tremulous crimson.

"I'm hungry." It was Chillon's daily litany. He wiped his fat face and blinked expectantly.

"Eat!" Jean scanned the empty waste, the windless sky, and baled anew. Chillon took out a tin of meat and cut the lid.

"Empty it into a dish!" said Jean, "and I will eat with you."

Chillon's knife rang on the thwart and fell into the bottom of the boat. Jean frowned and looked up. Chillon was holding the meat-tin about a yard from his face; his eyes bulged; he looked puzzled.

"You are sick?" said Jean, moving a little forward without relinquishing the tiller. "What is wrong, Antoine?"

"See!" His hands shook as he slanted the tin before Jean's eyes. A pint of brown sand spilled across the bottom of the boat. Jean gaped, leaned forward, and drew from under the thwart another of the close-packed tins. He sliced it open and glared at it stupidly. That also was full of sand.

Chillon wrenched off the battens that enclosed the space beneath the thwart. He flung himself upon the lying tins and dug them out like a dog

unearthing buried bones. He ripped them open one by one. Jean trembled as he watched him pitching tin after tin of sand into the sea. The last one showed meat, two pounds of meat.

"Put it back! put it back!" cried Jean. "Let us think!"

They rose slowly to a comprehension of the facts. "*Dieu de Dieu!*" wailed Chillon, and beat his breast; "we are tricked! we are lost! It is your enemy, Jean!"

"Wait!" said Jean. "We still have biscuit and water."

"Biscuit and water!" echoed Chillon. All the life had gone out of his face, his teeth closed with a snap. A thought came to him: he pulled out the tins from beneath the other thwart. Two only contained biscuit, twenty were filled with sand.

"Try the water!" said Jean hoarsely. Chillon did not hear him.

Jean stepped along, raised the water-cask from the foot of the mast, and shook it. The gurgling wash within showed it still three-quarters full.

Yet he was not satisfied: he remembered noticing that the tap only trickled, instead of gushing. He turned it, and let the water run into his pint pot. When the pint pot was full the cask gave no more.

Jean tested its weight and shook it again; then with his knife he prised open the end. The water came up to within an inch of the top, but it looked thick and glassy. He bent his head and tasted.

"What is wrong?" hissed Chillon. "The water is there?"

"Yes," Jean answered steadily; "but it is salt—brine! The cask has a false bottom!"

. . . . .

The seas lifted lazily and gurgled under the stern of the drifting boat. Jean went back to the tiller; but the boat made no headway, and there was no sign of wind in the sky, no breath on the grey floor of ocean.

"I've been trapped!" Chillon bit out the words. "*Jésus Marie!* I've been led out to perish like a pig, to hunger and thirst. You must know something of this, Jean Barradas. Who would do it? Not André, not Carnac, not Délion—no, no!" His blistered hands were locked above his head, his bloodshot eyes brightened with the fear of the death that faced them on the naked seas.

Jean covered his face. The boat rocked with the motion of Chillon's swaying body. The oily bilge swam with a sucking noise over the bottom of the boat.

"*Cré nom!* it serves me right. I should have guessed that your enemy had set a trap. Sarsot warned me, and I laughed. Why did you not test the food—the sand heap? the gall they have given us to drink? God! if I had an enemy I should keep awake. Thou art blind! blind!"

For an instant Chillon's thoughts went back to the woman Calphurnia he had met in Paris, years before. Was it possible that she had conceived this devilish scheme? He dared not think, dared not suggest her name to Jean. Awkward questions might be raised. Silence was his only safeguard, for if Jean once learned that he, Chillon, had . . .

His lips tightened instinctively, as though to keep his tongue from babbling her name.

Jean stood up and leaned against the mast. His strong eyes pierced the horizon for a sign of wind. There was none. He turned and bent to Chillon.

"I am sorry for this, my comrade, because I tempted you to come. Yet I wished to serve you. This is horrible! But let us consider, Antoine. We have a little water—nearly a quart; we have biscuit and meat enough for some days. And we cannot reach Australia in fewer than eighteen or twenty days at the least. We must trust to ships. Courage! there is still hope!"

Chillon wriggled and wiped his streaming face. "We shall die!" he moaned. "*Jésus!* it is hard to perish of hunger and thirst. We shall go mad and snap at each other. Our bodies will be found yellow, shrunken, covered with birds! Pah!" Chillon lay on his belly and hid his face.

The red west received the sun. A white-billed seafowl drowsed in the windless vault above, its pinions beat across the silence with a louder noise than Chillon's heart.

Night came; they stared at each other, waiting for the moon to lift. The boom flapped; the tiny boat staggered this way and that like a frightened bird in the dark. Jean dozed fitfully, gripping the tiller in his left hand. He dreamed of a sea that lay as still as salt; no reef or island marked its silence-haunted leagues. Suddenly a black ship swept down the glittering wastes. The moon whitened her shrouds; a hundred corpse-like faces glow-

ered at him over the sides. No sound came from those wretched lips, there was no sound but the swish and rumble of brine from her gloomy bows. Fear held him dumb. She rode past, voiceless as the dead, horrible as a plague-ship. All at once the pealing notes of an organ filled the hollow of the ghostly ship, a moaning anthem that seemed to steal across the world and fill his heart with tears. The half-set moon lit up the awning-covered deck. A shape leaned over the rail and called out to him.

"Father! father! have pity on us!"

It was his son's voice, and he saw that he was holding a girlish figure to his breast. Her white vestments blew about him like wings, his face was almost hidden in the shadows of her hair.

"Father! father! have pity on us!" And this time the girl's voice was one with his son's.

Jean dreamed that he shook his fist at the boy he loved. "There is no mercy on earth or in heaven! Curse you! Why do you pass me by?" The black ship swung away to the west and was buried in the clouds.

A sharp blow on the temple awoke him; the boom had swung over and struck him. He leant back stiff-limbed and agape. Chillon was asleep with his hands under his bull neck, his hairless face upturned to the sky.

The moon in the south-east showed Jean Barradas a dark outline stealing across the horizon. He sprang forward and hung a lantern before the flapping jib-sheet. There was a chance that the spark of light would be seen. He set his teeth and waited.

A few puffs fluttered the boom, and the slight sound brought Chillon upright, staring at the lantern above him.

"Ha, what is this?" He pitched forward under the sheet. "God! She is keeping away. Ahoy! Ahoy!" His voice died away in a short bark across the leagues of glimmering ocean.

"Save your breath, Antoine! An exploding shell could not be heard at the distance. If they see our spark they may come."

The wind freshened, and the boat lay over nuzzling the white rime over her tiny beak. At midnight the moon set and the darkness shut them in again. Chillon sobbed loudly; his starved eyes searching the gulf, the ends of his grimy neckcloth gripped between his teeth.

All that day the horizon remained free from spars; no trail of smoke relieved the unending curve of blue and grey. Jean portioned out the food, giving to each barely sufficient to sustain life. On the next day Chillon caught a fish with a thread from his shirt and a bent pin. He ate it raw—ate it fearfully with an eye on the sleeping Jean. The relentless sun flayed their salted skins, to be followed by the cold whips of night. Drenched with sudden seas, pinched by empty stomachs, they cursed God and the ships and the waters that locked them in.

At night Chillon would glare with famished eyes at the white wedge of phosphorus that slunk in their wake—the sign of a shark with an instinct for prey. The heart knocking at his starved ribs rebelled against the sleuth persistence of this mon-

ster of the deep. Hour after hour he would stare at the grey triangle of fin cutting here and there, and sometimes he heard the swift *r-reep* of the fin as it tore under their thin hull. Then he would lean over with his long thin knife, stabbing wildly at the elusive white belly that turned beyond his reach. So three more days passed, and the end seemed near. The hoarded meat was eaten; the remnant of water could almost be measured by drops. Hunger gnawed them; thirst tortured them.

Jean Barradas rarely complained. His steady hand reached for the tiller whenever a sudden breeze caught Chillon brooding at his post. The dawn of a new morning saw Chillon dozing forward huddled and limp, his scared face upturned, his body shrunken and wasted. A single word from Jean brought him clutching at the boom, his lips wrenched apart.

"A sail? No, no, Jean! God is keeping all the ships away!" But Jean's finger indicated a schooner-rigged yacht steering up from the sun's eye. Her lean hull split the glassy levels like a diamond wedge. Straight as a drawn line she came, radiating blinding filaments of light from her polished brass-work. The wind came with her. A maddening smell of food filtered into their starved lungs.

Chillon wept.

Closer and closer she came. Chillon laughed, Jean smiled. They could not be missed. There was hardly need to shout. Yet Jean shouted; Chillon howled.

Now she was almost abreast of them. Not a man

was to be seen on her decks. Not a voice broke the silence. Jean shivered; there was something ghastly in the stillness.

"It is the yacht we saw at Nouméa," Chillon muttered.

And she passed them, passed so close that they could have almost leapt aboard her, in the same awful silence.

Not till she was past did they realise that they had not been seen, that they would not be helped. Then even Jean became a madman, and raved and shrieked with the madman Chillon. The yacht took no notice. Steadily she made her way into the west, and soon was hull down on the waters. They gazed after her till the last gleam of hope was gone; then, with an awful imprecation, Chillon threw up his hands and dived into the water.

Jean clenched his teeth, brought the tiller round, dropped the sail, and waited for him to come up. He rose just under the boat's quarter, but did not reach the surface. Jean lay over the side and dragged him in, insensible. It was long before he came round. Jean poured the last of the water down his throat. Chillon drank it greedily, and slept. Jean returned to the tiller, and set the boat's head east. His face was very pale; he knew he could not do much more. But a man should fight till the last.

The long day passed. Chillon woke up light-headed, and dozed again, babbling of France in his dreams.

The sun dropped in an agony of red, and Jean wondered if he would see another sunset. The brief

twilight was passing. Jean slept over the tiller. The wind had fallen somewhat.

He heard his name, and awoke with a start. Chillon was standing up, shouting hoarsely and gesticulating. "There! See!"

Jean followed his finger astern and saw the yacht once more, heading straight for them. Her tapering masts stood out against the paling sky. She seemed walking foot by foot on the waves, stooping her nose to fling back the crusted drops into the quaking depths. It was magnificent.

Jean's lips moved in prayer; his pain-dragged body lay curled over the tiller handle. He tried to cry his thanks to God, but the swollen tongue denied him—clogged like a fig against the dry roof of his mouth. He flung himself forward and lit his lantern, though it was yet light. There must be no mistake this time. Then he dropped his sail and waited.

Chillon laughed hysterically and wrung his wasted hands across the bows.

Boom! *R-r-rrp!* Down came the yacht's mainsail; the narrow hull crushed the white foam against the boat as she wheeled and curled round the perishing Frenchmen. Her yards were dotted with turbans. Lights leaped with magic swiftness from shroud to shroud, she was suddenly illuminated as if for a festival. A clash of cymbals, a drumming of gongs, struck brazenly upon the stillness, and the strange sound seemed to murder reality and turn the livid wastes to an enchanted sea.

The boat pecked in the backwash not twenty feet astern.

"Ahoy!" shouted Chillon.

A sleek-bodied lascar approached the side, holding a huge shallow dish above his head, and slowly, very slowly, he emptied a thin, savory stream into the ocean. Chillon sprang forward to cast himself under the delicious mess, and the fin of a shark rose up under the stern.

He threw up his hands in an agonising appeal. "Oh, sir! wait a little until we can come under you. Do not waste such heavenly food. Oh, wait, sailor; wait until we drift nearer!"

He beat the sea frantically to urge the boat forward. The sleek-bodied lascar made no sign. He stood like a brown idol, filtering his fragrant mess under their noses into the sea. The din of gongs continued. The white figures in the rigging raised their voices in a whining chant. The lascar emptied the last morsel from his dish, and stood with eyes fixed on a single star in the darkening east. The yacht skilfully maintained her distance.

"Monsieur!" pleaded Chillon, "we have been five days without food or water. If you could see us in the light you would pity us." He paused to moisten his cracked lips, to cough away the rasp in his parched throat. Jean sat silent; he did not understand.

"A cup of water, Monsieur, and we will die content! Ah, Monsieur, you will not turn away from the perishing. Pity, Monsieur! pity!" Chillon made his appeal frantically; but his head drooped to his chest. The lascar contemplated the star absently, cuddled his dish, and stalked away.

The wash from the narrow-beamed yacht lapped

and gurgled round the boat. Jean stood up and tried to speak, but the chanting lascars, the clashing cymbals drowned his voice.

The same sleek-bodied lascar returned with his dish, poised it against his breast, and spilled out a stream of chopped meats and curry under their noses. The ravishing, spicy odour struck their aching vitals. Chillon balanced forward, and put out his tongue, but missed the delicious stream by an inch. A savage pucker lined Jean's brow; his fist closed on the knife in his belt. What was the meaning of this inhuman torture? What business had brought this Satanic yacht across their track?

No sane mariners would waste their time wheeling around helpless castaways. The deadly indifference of her crew filled him with strange dread. This could not be real; it was too inhuman.

The yacht tacked and sailed round them; she swung and dipped like a black-beaked vulture over its prey. Then she took her place again a little ahead, with speed graduated to the speed of the boat moving slowly under its tiny jib. It was now quite dark.

The boat drifted nearer, nearer under the yacht's stern. A yard of chain dangling from a square cabin window attracted Chillon. He put his mouth to Jean's ear. "Let us climb aboard! Let us fight for food! We have good knives; we can hack our way to the galley." His famished eyes shone.

Another wave drove them under the window. Chillon clutched at the chain and missed. A long boat-hook stabbed them from the darkness and sent them tossing helplessly astern. The hook remained

in mid-air threatening them like a spear. A laugh filtered shrilly through the window.

Silence again, broken by a whimper of despair.

Once more the whining lascars began their monotonous chant, cymbals and gongs beating discordant time. No word had been spoken to the Frenchmen; they were unnoticed save for the laugh that came from the cabin.

"Jesus God! It is not real," wailed Chillon. "We dream. I have read of such a ship haunting the seas; it comes before death to torture castaways. Mother of God, have pity!"

Jean hung his head sullenly. Half-shaped thoughts struggled disconnectedly in his starved brain. A latent dread stirred him, a dread of some near irresistible Fury, a Thing with a hundred claws, a relentless human tiger that would batten upon his tortured body. Chillon was crouching back near the jib, open-jawed, glowering at the lascars in the rigging.

Suddenly a piece of biscuit cracked against their mast. Chillon snapped up the shattered bits with animal ferocity, and humped his short body for a struggle with Jean if more should come. Again the laugh came through the cabin window. Jean Barradas writhed. A game was being played, a savage, inhuman game; they were being baited like beasts. It was a yacht of devils.

The gong-clamour ceased. The illuminated yards still showed the slinking forms watching them with animal patience.

A brick-red moon stalked out of the west, and the

scarce moving sea mirrored a dusky, wavering flare as if a huge cinder was singeing the ocean floor.

At midnight an order was breathed along the yacht's deck. A squat figure appeared at the stern-window, and a shower of loaves fell into and around the boat. Chillon seized one and munched eagerly. A keg of water followed, falling with a crash within a foot of Jean. He sat immobile.

Then a dozen shapes slipped along the yacht's yards. There was a "Hool-ya!" as her sails were set. One by one the sails filled, barring out the risen moon from the boat. The yacht moved away, striking a phosphorescent trail from under her black hull. The lascars chanted.

Jean hoisted his sail while Chillon tore another loaf asunder.

The weird chant of the lascars died away. Once more that strange laugh rang and echoed. Jean stared after the glittering hull until the horizon blotted it out, until nothing remained on the face of the waters save an odour of burnt incense.

PART IV

THE REVENGE OF JEAN BARRADAS

CHAPTER I

BRINGS UNWELCOME VISITORS TO JAMES SCAFFLES THE HATTER

Jean Barradas sat up and rubbed his eyes. Chillon was still sleeping in the shadow of the rocky ledge. Their boat had not drifted; her beak was driven into the flesh-white sands. Behind her lay the calm sapphire of the sea they had fought and overcome.

Jean had been dreaming an ugly dream, of a chain gang, and nickel mines, and guns booming from a prison fort above a grey sea-wall. He stretched out his foot and touched Chillon's ribs. There was a sharp grunt, a dreamy word of protest; but Chillon refused to move. He nestled his hip further into the soft sand, and curled himself tighter.

Jean felt compassion for him, and desisted. He stood up, walked to the boat, reflected and came back again.

"You must wake up, Antoine, and watch the boat. I am going to explore."

Chillon pretended to sleep, and Jean stooped and shook him gently. "You hear, Antoine? We cannot risk losing the boat."

"Yes, I hear," grunted Chillon without opening his eyes. "All right."

Jean stood a moment in hesitation, then clambered up the low rocks and surveyed the new country.

The sun was well above the horizon; they had slept heavily.

The tide creamed gently up the curving beach where they had landed overnight. In front stretched the illimitable jungle. A flock of parrots chattered in the near tree-tops. Jean walked a few steps, and was taken with a sudden yearning for the earth from which they had been banished so long. He threw himself down in a covert of ferns and inhaled the sweet odour of soil and vegetation, watching the sun climb up and up in the cloudless blue.

Presently he roused himself: he must find out where they were, and if any settlement was near. They wanted animal food: bread and water were good, but unsatisfying. They wanted to form plans for the future;—or Jean did. Chillon held to his idea of the little Australian wife who would work for him, and whom he would beat; he had no desire to return to France. But Jean felt that somehow, in some disguise, he must get back to his country. There was his son to see; there were still faithful friends who would hide him; and then he would devote his life to disentangling the monstrous plot of which he had been the victim, and—his muscles tightened, his jaw set—to revenge. Let him but find his enemy, but meet him once face to face with no barrier between them, and—who cared what came after?

He squared his shoulders and walked briskly northwards, following the coast; now walking on the hard white sand, and now, where a rocky point broke the line of beach, surmounting it and skirting the edge of the dense scrub.

A couple of miles brought him to a little stream; and on its bank, in a small clearing, Jean saw a hut. From the chimney a slender column of smoke rose straight into the warm still air. Jean approached cautiously.

He was within a few paces when a black-and-white dog looked up from the shadow of the wall, and instantly dashed at him, barking furiously. A man holding a frying-pan appeared in the doorway, with a half-alarmed look on his weazened face. Jean stepped up, and the growling dog made way before him.

"Good morning!" said Jean, who was forcing brain and tongue to remember his long-disused English.

"Good day!" said the man in the doorway, waiting suspiciously, with a claw-like hand on his frying-pan, and a glance to where an old gun hung on the wall within.

"Can you—give—something—to eat?"

"Who are you?" asked the man sullenly; "and what are y' doin' 'ere?"

"We are—shipwrecked," replied Jean, thinking out his words; "have—money."

"Oh, y' 'ave money," said the man, relaxing none of his watchfulness; "and how was y' ship-wrecked?"

"Cannot speak well Englees," evaded Jean; "but —we have—hunger; can you—give—to eat?"

"Well, I can give y' a bit o' corn' beef," said the weazened man; "but I'm a poor man, and y' wouldn't take it without paying, would y'? I'll sell y' tucker enough to get to the township; it's only a

matter o' fifteen miles south from here. How did y' come? Got a boat?"

"Yes," said Jean; "boat—little way—with my friend."

"Oh, y' 'ave a friend, 'ave yer? Well, I don't reckon to feed no shipwrecked crew, y' know; I haven't got it, an' I won't do it. But wait there, an' I'll get y' a bit of beef an' some flour."

He dived into the hut and returned with a package. The black-and-white dog eyed Jean resentfully as he took it.

"Now, my advice to y' is to get down to the township as quick as y' can," said the weazened man. "There's nothin' here for y'. I'm a poor miner, I am—and don't want any furriners messin' round the claim either," he added in a lower tone. "So"—raising his voice—"my advice to you is, clear out! I won't ast yer for anythin' for the tucker; but, clear out!"

He whistled the dog into the hut and slammed the door viciously; and Jean walked meditatively back to the boat. The township? It would be a township, with police, and he knew that in Australia escapees from New Caledonia were arrested and sent back to the Island. They must move cautiously.

He found the boat as he had left it. Chillon had not shifted, but his eyes were open.

"Jean! my preserver! source of all human joys!" he cried ecstatically; "have you got something for breakfast?"

Jean set down his beef and flour and told his story. Chillon hacked off a piece of beef and a hard crust of loaf, and ate cheerfully as he listened.

"I suppose we shall have to go to this township," concluded Jean; "but we must not go together. Perhaps we can work there for a little while, and take an opportunity to go south to Sydney."

"Not for me!" said Chillon; "or not just yet. I will not move to-day. I am stiff with brine; I want a time of delicious laziness; I want to cuddle this fine country to my much-enduring bosom." He rolled over and over on the sand snapping his fingers. "To think that little more than a month ago I was Number One-nine-six wheeling a barrow for that beast of a Carnac! Laugh, Jean! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Jean eyed him with paternal kindness; he was a good soul, Chillon—so gay! the cloud of the island had passed from him already; even the agony of the voyage was forgotten. They drowsed in the shadow of the rock, talking idly.

Suddenly Jean sat up. A shadow fell across the sand. The weazen-faced man, carrying his gun, stood on the rock above, looking at their boat. His eye followed the footmarks in the sand. He looked down and started as he saw them.

"Oh, there y' are, are y'! Thought I'd just come and see how y' was gettin' along. Now, my advice to yous is to get along to the township quick!"

Jean stood up and faced him. Chillon stretched over and caught a fragment of rock, watching the figure above from the corner of his eye.

"What—to do—with boat?" said Jean politely.

"Well, y' can leave it there if y' like," said the man on the cliff. "I wouldn't mind ownin' her my-

self—he, he! Or y' can sail her to Brisbane if y' like."

"Tell him we have had enough sea for a hundred lives," said Chillon, catching the meaning of the gesticulating claw: "and ask him for more food."

"My friend," said Jean, "says fatigue—mus' rest—eat—gain—the strength."

The weazen-faced man was taken with a fit of indignation. "All right; don't say I didn't warn y'!" He disappeared suddenly.

"I wonder what he does," said Jean slowly. "He says he is a miner; if he has a mine we could work for him."

"Work!" said Chillon with a look of horror. "Work! Poor Jean, he is crazy!" He confided the news to the sea, cast a look of mock-disgust at Jean, and curled himself up to sleep again.

Jean looked to the boat and set off on a southward walk along the coast. Returning in the afternoon without an adventure, he found that Chillon was discoursing music to the wavelets with his flute. He had eaten nearly all the beef, and looked supremely happy.

"I made some cakes for you, Jean," he said; "but they were so good that I finished all but those." He pointed to two very small brown lumps on the rock.

"Thank you," said Jean simply, and gratefully ate the remnant of beef. This poor Chillon! he had suffered so much.

At sunset they lay under their ledge of rock and slept soundly. Jean woke at dawn with a sudden dream of danger, and saw the weazen-faced man

peering over their boat. At the next moment he looked up and saw the Frenchman.

"I just came to bring y' some onions," he said apologetically, retreating towards the cliff and holding his gun with both hands. He pointed to a dozen small onions in a heap on the beach, and his face broke into ingratiating furrows. "'Tain't often we get onions up here, they're mighty rare."

He paused a moment to wipe his nervous face and observe effects.

"Yous'll quit to-day; y' wouldn't stop in such a hole as this." He turned to the beach and shaded his lashless eyes. "That's a real nice boat there, and y' could easily go down the Barrier 'n' have a regular picnic. I'll let yous have a few pumkins and a billy of flour." His face lit up with sudden generosity. "There's a few more onions left, y' can take 'em; and that's all the food there is about the place. S'elp me Gawd!"

He poised his shrivelled figure against a boulder and watched them from the corner of his little eyes.

Jean Barradas frowned. "Why—go? Why—you wish—go—so soon? We hurt not—you. Can you not—give work? We plough—dig!"

The man shot a suspicious glance at Jean; his body writhed as if some one had skewered him suddenly from behind.

"There ain't no digging about here. Whoever heard of it?" he said querulously. "Why, yous could quarry that hill yonder through and through and never see a colour. There's iron, maybe, and some scraps of tin, but Lord! there ain't a speck of gold."

Jean strained to catch his meaning.

"Get—more—to eat," he said slowly, "more meat." Chillon gasped like a man about to die. The weazen-faced man retreated, shaking his head.

"Maybe there's a bit of meat in the bag, maybe there ain't; yous nearly finished it yesterday." He retreated up the beach.

Jean followed him slowly. There was something peculiar about this man, he told himself.

The man paused at the door of his slab hut, and took a key from his pocket.

"Yous needn't bother to come in," he said, throwing a quick glance over his shoulder. "There ain't no seats inside. Just stand where y' are 'n' I'll hand out the tucker."

Jean rested his back against a tree, and waited. He felt that it was good to touch earth again, to taste leaves and drink the clear water from the pools in the rocks. It was good to see the sun edging over the wide roof of jungle, spearing through the hot leaves like yellow rain. The *thump! thump!* of a wallaby startled him from a reverie, recalling the tramp of gendarmes. He recollected, and smiled.

The weazen-faced man came to the door, holding up a greasy bag as if to allow the full weight to register itself on his brain. He handed it to Jean with a sigh.

"Yous'll have to go south; there ain't no more tucker, not enough to feed a duck." One hand was behind his back holding the door jealously.

Jean took the bag and his eyes wandered to the interior of the hut. Under a tiny window at the far end he saw a heavy sea-chest, clamped with iron.

The miner banged the door and locked it. Jean smiled pleasantly. "Fine chest—for onions—Monsieur?"

The little man winced and plunged into a hurried explanation. "Me 'n' Ned Cassidy hauled it off the beach years ago. Y' see there weren't no sense in letting it rot; it belonged to a schooner that broke up on the point yonder. 'Tain't no good, anyhow, 'n' I'd swap it for a sack of spuds, 's sure's my name's Jim Scaffles."

Jean walked away with the bag tucked under his arm. He found Chillon sitting up alert and hungry. "Pot luck, eh, *mon* Jean? English beef and onions, onions and English beef. Monsieur Barradas, never send your son to sea! Never send your son to sea," he reiterated, eyeing the bag reflectively.

"It was good enough for you yesterday," said Jean.

"Barradas the philosopher!" murmured Chillon, picking out an onion. "He is content to live to-day as yesterday! He forgets and forgives the sea. Wicked Jean, to run away from La Nouvelle; wicked Jean to tell Chillon such pretty tales of Australia, of its milk and fat and its—*phew!*—onions! Ouch! Providence played us a dirty trick when it introduced us to Skinflint."

"His name is Jeem Scaffel," said Jean.

"Scaffel the Mean!" Chillon rolled in the warm sand.

Jean glanced at him reproachfully. "We were lucky to find him. Let us be friendly with Jeem Scaffel. This township is not safe yet; it means

gaol and Nouvelle. We will wait. Scaffel will trust us presently, and find us work."

Chillon frowned, then laughed immoderately. "Work, *bon Dieu!* Did I not face the horrors of the Pacific to escape it? Work? Oh, Jean, has it come to this? Many cruel things have been said against Chillon, and Chillon has borne them, but never did Chillon contemplate work!"

"You worked at Nouméa," said Jean sternly. "You worked on the new sea-wall."

Chillon sighed regretfully. "I had the French army at my back. What was Chillon to do? He couldn't kick the army's shins."

"I saw you kick a warder once," said Jean.

"Mâtin! Yes," said Chillon simply, "and I was flogged. It was foolish of me to kick." He lingered sadly over the memory of the flogging.

"Yet you must work, Antoine! Do you hear? There are no jewellers' windows to smash, no pockets to pick here. Believe me, Antoine, you will be very happy."

Chillon lay on his back, elevated his short legs, and permitted his heels to describe a parabolic curve, otherwise he did not betray any unusual emotion at the prospect of toil.

A magpie flew down from the scrub, filling the air with quaint melody, and perched on an outer tree to watch them.

Jean kindled a fire in the hollow of the rocks. Soon a smell of broiled meat quickened Chillon's pulse and made him feel glad. After breakfast he took his flute from his pocket and lipped a strain

from "Norma." He was a born musician, and had belonged to the convict band at Nouméa.

"'Tis a sweet thing," he said, wiping the flute, "if you catch the spirit of it—sweeter than an anthem, or a peal of bells on a windy night."

Their second day passed idly; and nothing disturbed their sleep.

Next morning Chillon complained that there was not enough for breakfast. "Shall we go to the township, and earn money for food?" asked Jean.

They argued the point; but the wolf inside Chillon was irresistible. "There is food with Jeem Scaffel. And he does not want us. Therefore let us go and see Jeem Scaffel!"

CHAPTER II

SHOWS HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO ENGAGE IN HONEST INDUSTRY

"Ohé!"

Chillon had caught sight of some wild turkeys pattering along the edge of the scrub. In a second his flute was in his pocket; and he was stooping for a load of rock-fragments, poising and testing them. A sudden fire came in his eyes.

"Wait, Jean!—or go on; they may be shy. But if once I get them within stone-throw, trust your Chillon!"

He struck a menacing attitude, and was off to the spot where the turkeys had been swallowed in the undergrowth.

Jean Barradas reached the hut once more, and found it shut. He prowled along the little track that seemed to have been hewn out of the jungle; it led him through the sunless gully over pick-torn stone, where miners had been recently at work. He paused a moment and listened intently; a faint *click, click*, lingered in the air and stopped. Jean glanced sun-ward to measure his locality with the near ranges. A brown hawk swam in the blinding glare overhead; he shut it out with his open hand and blundered across the gully towards the strange sounds. The bush opened on to a rocky flat. Rough ridges barred out the north; a waterless stream-bed

guttered the dingy levels. Jean picked up a handful of iron-stone dust, and tossed it aside carelessly. A few crows cawed above him and dropped away to the line of gum-trees that ribbed the foot of the hill in front. The pick-strokes became more distinct; Jean paused thoughtfully.

There might be a mining camp in the hills, with law, discipline, and police. His blue serge clothes would not betray him, certainly, but well he knew that his sea-going look, his broken English, would lead to questions. The pick-strokes began again and stopped, then came sounds of a shovel scraping the hard rock. A familiar voice lifted itself, between the scrapings, into a querulous song. Jean smiled; it was Scaffles' voice, Scaffles singing in his joy of labour. He approached cautiously, and the swift lizards glanced under the stones from the iron-shod heel.

The sounds led Jean round the hill. He stole forward warily. High up on a narrow ledge stood Scaffles, stripped to the waist and labouring at a barrow. A mound of tailings sloped from the cliff-side; beyond a sharp angle of rock was a dark tunnel piercing the belly of the hill. Jean sighed at this monument of one man's labour, and moved forward. Scaffles wiped his face; took a drink from a billy, and disappeared in the tunnel. The pick hummed and rang again.

Jean ventured into the open and pitched a stone against the cliff, then another and another. Scaffles, accustomed to his own noise, noticed the new sound and came out alarmed and peering. He glanced below and saw Jean. His jaw dropped, his knees

knocked together; the pick in his hands shook violently.

"How goes—your mine?" Jean smiled genially. "May I come up?"

Scaffles recovered himself slowly and dabbled his face with a rag. "Who showed yer the place, 'n' what the blazes d'ye want, anyhow? Didn't I tell yer there wasn't anythin' 'ceptin' a few scraps of tin? Didn't I explain that there weren't no show for two? an' here yous come settlin' around 'n' layin' a crowd on fer certain."

"We must—work," said Jean, "must have to eat for myself—my comrade. Let me—help you!"

Scaffles crouched back and settled his wiry limbs into a cat-like attitude: his foxy hair bristled with fear and rage as Jean made an upward movement.

"Don't come pokin' up here! It ain't worth while."

But Jean clambered to the top of the quarried steps and stared wonderingly at the work of one human ant. Scaffles spat venomously on his palms and gripped his pick.

"Long time!" said Jean, striding round the ledge, "long time, all this! Two—three—better than one."

Jean's voice was calm and persuasive. He stooped and picked a piece of quartz from the heap Scaffles had set aside for dollying. He rubbed it carelessly on his sleeve, moistened it with his lip, and rubbed it again. Then he smiled in Scaffles' face.

"Gold! Rich!"

Scaffles drew up stiffly in front of his tunnel; his lean body writhed, his breath came sharply.

"Yous—intend—ter—jump—a—man's—claim—eh?" He jerked it out with deadly emphasis.

"But, no!" said Jean, comprehending the gesture rather than the phrases. "But room—here—for many miner. Mountain not yours?"

Jean glanced round swiftly at the primitive drive, the one barrow, the one pick, the one man. He laughed bitterly. "You must live—tousand year—my friend—so! to succeed!"

"It's my mountain," choked Scaffles; "I tramped from Normanton to find it; I starved an' lied an' sweated ter keep others from it, 'n' I'll keep yous off it: by God! I'll keep y' off!"

His gestures, his animal greed, filled Jean with savage disgust.

"You are mad! We begin—work here—to-morrow!"

"I'm mad, eh?" Scaffles sniggered foolishly. "This place ain't so far off a township as you think. Pat Donegan finds it worth while ter look me up now 'n' then. He's police, and a big friend of mine."

The visible change that came over the convict at the word "police" nerved Scaffles like brandy; the quiver of fear left his voice, he became wildly bold.

"Pat's due here soon! Maybe he'll make a few inquiries about that little boat of yourn; it don't look like a fisherman's, 'n' there's been more'n one convict found his way here from over there. *I'll* see that Donegan looks you up!"

Jean stood up with his body bent forward, a sudden snarl on his drawn lips.

"You clear!" said Scaffles, skipping back. "You—just—clear!"

He half turned into his tunnel; Barradas made a clutch at his belt and pinned him against the wall.

"Fool! Miserable! you should not tell. I would —help—you—rich! You would betray! Beast!"

Jean held him by the waist and pitched him savagely into the tunnel. So, at every step men threatened his liberty. And he was only seeking work and food. He overcame a sudden impulse to dash in and throttle the man who knew so much.

Slowly, very slowly, he descended from the rocky ledge. The haziness of the tropical morning had passed, and the sea-breeze was coming to help the earth, fired beneath the relentless rays of the sun. A coloured stone flared in the distance; he peered at it again and again until the fierce light seemed to turn it to a deep blood-red. He crossed the empty watercourse into the gully; it was strangely cool, and from the pebbly floor peeped trembling ferns. He glanced between the rocks and saw a tiny pool welling up in the hollow. For a little while he sat beside it, his hands locked across his knees, his brooding face mirrored in its depths.

Then he made up his mind, and walked briskly along the track until he reached Scaffles' hut. He approached it swiftly and tried the door; it was fastened. He swung his powerful back against it and burst it open; then stepped inside, and walked to the sea-chest in the corner.

It was locked; but a hammer lay conveniently on the floor, and three blows burst the chest open. A

row of bags was neatly piled at the bottom like loaves in a baker's oven.

"Every miser his own banker," muttered Jean, and dragged them out one by one. He jerked one open and brought out a handful of yellow dust, rich specimens—ironstone percolated with gold. He looked again, and in the till of the chest found a cashbox containing a roll of Queensland bank-notes, some silver coins, and seventy sovereigns. Of these he took fifty, replacing them with fifty hoarded Napoleons, the savings of his nine years' servitude in New Caledonia. Then he put back the bags, and locked the box. He was no thief, but he would have taken a revolver if he had found one. He looked around for Scaffles' gun; but that was missing—the miser-miner had taken it with him or had concealed it. Jean felt the need of a better weapon than his knife. He had determined to sell his new-found liberty dearly, and the threatened coming of trooper Donegan troubled him. Yet it might be mere bravado on Scaffles' part to frighten him away from the golden mountain. He closed the door, and fixed the broken lock with his knife and some fallen screws, until it snapped on the catch.

An iguana raced along an overhanging limb and watched him knowingly. The cry of a scrub turkey brought him into the open, staring right and left. He listened intently, but only the *zing, zing* of locusts and the drumming of the surf disturbed the stillness; the sound of the sea smote his ears pleasantly, after his hasty glimpse into the Australian wilderness.

Then a musical note caught his ear; he looked up

and saw Chillon strolling along, pleasantly tootling his flute. A dead turkey was hung round his neck by a piece of vine.

"Only one, Jean!" he cried. "The others took to flight where I could not follow. *Peste!* the trees grow thickly in this country. I thought I would never find my way out. So it is only one. But so fat, so juicy; see!"

He fingered the turkey's breast with a connoisseur's touch. "And you, Jean, what have you found? Not work? Heavens! say it is not work!"

Jean told briefly the story of Scaffles.

"And he has much gold?" Chillon's eyes gleamed; he pocketed his flute and made for the hut, but Jean barred his way.

"You must not touch it. We are not robbers. And if *you* were, we are too close to the law." And he told of the threatened advent of constable Donegan.

"*Hein!* That complicates matters," said Chillon. "Yet a little gold will not make us any the worse. Surely, Jean, these scruples are misplaced after the long years in Nouvelle! Let me go!"

"I tell you no!" said Jean in a voice there was no denying. Chillon measured him with his eye and stood sulkily.

"Cursed nonsense!" he exclaimed.

"Come, my friend, don't let us quarrel! Believe me, it is best. And we must go—go at once away from here; we must not be here when Scaffles returns. Perhaps he is watching us now."

"I should like to put five fingers on his throat—

tight!" grunted Chillon. "You are too merciful, Jean!"

"We must not kill unless some fool flings himself upon us, and then—pah! You will be right, Chillon. Why should we go back to Nouméa to be kennelled like dogs? I will not be hounded and tricked again." Jean's brooding face was dark; his fists hung at his side.

"Let us try the bush, Jean; it is as black as a beast's mouth. Let us go in and catch animals and eat them. *Hein!* I could relish cooked kangaroo and liberty."

"There is no hope that way, Antoine. We must take to the sea again. We will go at once to this township. It is only two or three hours' run. Then one of us can go in and buy provisions, and we will go to a bigger port in the south and lose ourselves among people."

Chillon assented reluctantly, and walked off with a lingering glance at the hut which held such riches. If he could have given Jean the slip! But Jean strode by his side, regretting his ill-timed lenity. He told himself again and again that he should have placed Scaffles beyond the pale of evidence—gagged and flung him into his own golden tunnel.

"I will not go back to Nouméa! I will not suffer hell again!" He whispered it to himself as they tramped down to the boat, while his hard-set muscles clinched under his thick serge coat.

They reached the place where they had slept. "Where is the boat?" cried Chillon aghast.

The boat was gone.

CHAPTER III

BEGINS WITH A FEAR AND ENDS WITH A THREAT

Scaffles sat on the upturned bucket, quivering with rage.

For seven years he had kept his golden mountain secret. Miners in twos and threes had tramped the ranges and ignored it; syndicate-parties, expensively equipped, had explored here and there and reported unfavourably. Sometimes a lonely prospector drifted from west or north, pitching his tent amongst the mountain ridges. And Scaffles, perched like a crow on the peak of his golden hill, would scan the new-comer in fear and trembling. For days he would not touch a pick lest tell-tale echoes might bring the visitor to his workings. Finally he would approach the unwelcome prospector to beg a handful of flour, and to state how he had searched every gully and reef without striking a colour. His famished appearance had a demoralising effect, and after he had pointed out some of his abandoned pot-holes, the most sanguine miner would pack up and depart, cursing the district. Then the chuckling Scaffles would mount his eyrie and watch one more baffled adventurer hurrying from the region of despair.

He had sunk on a rich outcrop, and had been getting gold for years. Then his ragged shaft had grown too deep to work effectively with his one

man's labour, his primitive appliances; and he had commenced to drive a tunnel two hundred feet into the mountain. He dared not use dynamite, for fear of attracting attention; and with pick and crow-bar he had laboriously bitten away a few inches of rock every day for nearly two years. Luckily for him, the rock was so hard that he did not need to timber his tunnel.

And at last, only a month previously to Jean's arrival, he had struck the reef, and struck it rich and wide. There was a fortune in it. Yet he made no endeavour to enjoy his fortune. His vigilance redoubled when he saw his wealth, and he lived more meanly than ever. Daily he took out the richest of the stone, and dollied out the gold; and at night, in his hut, he would unlock his chest and gloat over his "specimens." The idea of going away with his gains, or of floating his mine on the market, never occurred to him. It seemed that all his thoughts, all his pleasure, were concentrated in the barren acts of seeking and finding—the hatter's destiny!

And now, after seven years' scheming and lying, a quiet man in blue serge clothes had strolled up to the front of his treasure-house demanding a share. Scaffles wiped the beads of agony from his scared visage.

Already he pictured the ranges peopled by swarms of aggressive claim-hunters from Croydon, Gympie, and the Towers, men who would cut and divide his mountain as if it were a piece of plum cake. He crouched over the ledge and watched Jean picking his way through boulders at the far end of the gully.

"He's off to tell his mate—the feller that's shammin' sick. I'll keep 'em off; by God! I'll keep 'em off my claim!"

He packed some slices of bread into a dirty cotton handkerchief and jammed them into his pocket. The pick, bucket, and shovel he concealed in the tunnel. Then he clambered from his conning-tower, the sweat streaming from his neck and face, and started with tremendous strides towards the south.

He did not go to his hut. At the head of the gully he turned off along a scrub path that would take him more quickly to the township by cutting off a convexity of coast.

"I'll show the furrin wretches a bit o' minin' law! I'll teach 'em to come nosin' round my claim threatenin' people's lives!"

The long strides changed to a trot, and the muscles of the wiry frame tightened under his ragged shirt as he crashed through the scrub into a well-beaten track.

At one point he mounted a hill and saw the sea where jagged promontories thrust their wooded points into cloud-white zones of surf, and a brood of snowy gulls cried out from the sea-smoke. Scaffles hated the sea. Continually it threatened him with invaders, and a gull was as abominable to him as a crow. He had often wished that some gigantic upheaval would shift his golden vault further inland, where he could labour and thirst and sweat, and win every ounce of yellow metal without fear of being preyed upon by the accursed nomads who ranged over the face of the continent.

His pace remained unchanged. Gullies and flats

were crossed in the same tireless jog. His face hung over his breast, his fists were clenched at his side; he ran like a boy in a chase. The swollen veins about his neck pulsed furiously. Every stride set his small heart hammering at his ribs. But he dared not stop to rest—even now the foreign vermin might be plundering his golden tunnel. His lips curled inside his teeth; he ran like a Jew.

Another track opened to the beach; he crashed forward until the deep sand gripped his heels and drowned his livid face in sweat.

"They shan't bluff me! I've tramped 'n' starved 'n' lied ter keep men off! I've covered my feet with blood 'n' dust to find it! Ain't it been there millions 'n' millions of years waiting fer me ter find it? Ain't the volcanoes worked fer me?—didn't they bury it in one hole 'n' cover it with basalt? I'll keep 'em off! They're convicts sure enough! Ho, ho, ho! won't Donegan give 'em hell! I'll shout fer Pat; I'll shout him a beer. 'Get out, yer curs!' he'll say. 'What d'yous mean by jumping my friend Jim's claim? Damn 'n' blast y'! get out!' Ho, ho!"

A cattle-bell rang before him. He turned sharply, leaving the ocean behind him. A wide valley stretched below, dotted with sugar-cane patches; deep bush grasses covered the slopes. An acrid smell of burning wood filtered up from the hollow. In the middle distance crouched a village of mean little huts where the coloured sugar-slaves dwelt.

Scaffles descended hurriedly, and the valley opened to reveal measured acres of cultivated land. A horde of Javanese ran, with mechanical regularity, up and down the green furrows, beating the trash

from the cane-stalks. Scaffles cantered past in feverish haste, unheeding the hail of the white overseer, and pulled up a mile further on.

. . . . .

"Hullo, Jim! ye look flurried, lad. Struck it rich, eh? Shouldn't be surprised. I always told 'em you would."

A brick-red man blundered from a slab and iron building, gazing at Scaffles with unfeigned delight. A rickety sign-board swung from the end of the verandah.

GEORGE CASSIDY

ROYAL HOTEL

was painted in fat, staggering letters on each side of the sign-board.

Scaffles looked over his shoulder fearfully.

"Struck what? D'y' think I'll ever strike anythin' but tin 'n' iron?" He shouted it hoarsely as if he intended his words to reach the yellow swarm in the near plantation. Then he dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Yer a blasted fool to sing out like that, George. Them cows would be on ter me claim like crows if they heard y'. Give us a chance, George!"

George showed symptoms of penitence for his rash observation. He struck himself on the breastbone.

"O' course, Jim; o' course they would!" He humoured the other good-naturedly. "There ain't nothin' wrong, Jim—nothin' really serious?"

He sat on a log and eyed his visitor. Scaffles snorted and twisted his thin screw of beard around his finger.

"D'y' think I'd be wastin' time trampin' over to this hole if there weren't hell to pay at my place? Have y' seen Pat Donegan lately?"

"Yer in luck, Jim! He's comin' up here to-day. There's been a row at Simmons'. Those cursed Javas nearly beat the life out of Jack Harris yesterday. Serve him right; he always said 'Treat 'em kindly! Treat 'em kindly!' Bah!"

Cassidy spat disgustedly on one boot and wiped the mark away with the other. "But what's the matter with you, Jim? Aren't ye comin' in to have a drink?"

"By and by!" said Scaffles. "I'm goin' to meet Donegan. Yer sure he hasn't passed yet?"

Before Cassidy could answer a long-bodied female stalked from the front door of the Royal Hotel and gazed at the shrinking, weazened figure beside her husband. She coughed and put up a big hand against the sun. Scaffles winced at sight of her and turned anxiously to look down the road. The long-bodied woman smiled an acid smile.

"You'll be wanting dinner, Mr. Scaffles, and something to drink? You look hot."

"I ain't come ter stay, Mrs. Cassidy. I ain't well enough ter eat; I'm worried."

"Worried, eh?" Her voice changed instantly. "You miserable old scarecrow! Why don't you eat and drink like other men? Are you afraid of the shilling we might charge you? And yet such men run down the Chinkies. Get out!"

"I ain't hungry," wailed Scaffles. "And your tucker always upsets me."

"I'm glad to hear it; you crooked old skinflint!

I'm glad to hear that food of mine has made you wriggle. Shoo!"

"That'll do, Liz—that'll do," growled George, shifting uneasily.

Every white man's friendship counted with George Cassidy, living as he did surrounded by a horde of coloured sugar labourers, who were at once his livelihood and his curse. To Cassidy, Scaffles was an unfortunate digger, trying hard to save a little money, slaving from dawn to sundown in a mine that had duffered out long ago.

Mrs. Cassidy scowled at the pair. "What does he want skulking about here then?"

"That'll do—that'll do." George made impatient curves with his pipe-stem while Scaffles wriggled and hugged his knees.

"I can come to this place if I like, ma'am. I want the law; I pay for it, and I'll have it."

Mrs. Cassidy swooped quite close to the log. "The law won't be here till two o'clock, so you can clear out to the top of the hill and feed with the crows. I see you have some cheese-parings in your pocket. Get out!"

She faced her husband sharply. "You softhead, you would sit there letting him smoke your tobacco that costs six shillings a pound—him that wouldn't give a dying man a drink unless he was paid for it! Get up, for God's sake, an' don't yarn. Do something! The place is tumbling about our ears for want of a few nails."

Scaffles edged away down the road. "I'll be back, George," he mumbled over his shoulder.

Cassidy looked after him meditatively. "Now,

what in the world is the matter with Jim? It's my belief he might have something there, after all. I'd go up and see, if it was safe to leave the pub."

Meanwhile Scaffles was hurrying along the road to the river and the township. A mile further down he stopped; he heard a horse coming towards him.

"Is that you, Pat?" He drew himself up, holding his breath. The noise came nearer, and turning a corner in the scrub a mounted trooper pulled up and scanned him.

"Good day to ye, Jim! Fwhoy are yez here, man?"

Scaffles stood on his toes and shook his fist towards the ranges where his claim lay. "I've been stuck up, Pat! I've had me life threatened!"

The trooper whistled. "Thot's bad!"

"How's a man ter live if he's got ter feed a shipload o' convicts? I can't do it. S'elp me Gawd, Pat! I haven't made three pennyweights this month! You know what my claim is, Pat; a bit of stuff here an' there 'n' maybe a colour, 'n' I've got ter support every shyster that comes bumming up the coast."

"Fwhat's that ye say consarning convicts, Jim?" The trooper walked his horse to allow the querulous Scaffles to keep pace. "Ye've been drinkin', Jim, oi'm afraid. Man, ye're all av a thrimble."

"Ain't it enough to shake a cove? Yesterday I went ter the beach ter see if I could pick up anythin', 'n' I stumbled on ter a boat, 'n' then a fire, 'n' a bit further I spots a couple of French coves. One of 'em was a-lyin' on the grass shammin' sick, jest

ter bluff tucker outer me. T'other one bustled me right off. Y'orter see him—big solemn cow with grey hair. No flies about him, no fear! Wouldn't let me talk; stopped me at the jump. 'Meat,' he says; 'meat and bread,' 'n' slams his fist on me shoulder. I gave him what he wanted; I had ter. Then he tracks me ter the claim 'n' threatens ter shift me out ter-morrer. They're French all right. Yer know where they come from, Pat, eh?"

The trooper felt his chin thoughtfully, bit the end of his switch, and looked down at the quaking figure beside him.

"Oi'll go over to-morrow, Jim. Not a wurrud to Cassidy till oi see fwhat they're loike."

Scaffles knit his hands together imploringly.

"Can't yer come to-night, Pat? They'll spile the workings; I don't feel safe with them."

"Howld yer thrap, Jim! Oi can't come to-day, because oi'm busy; and oi won't go to-night. Oi'll dale wid thim in daylight. 'Tis harrud to judge min in the dark. But 'tis moighty suspicious for thim to be lyin' on the bache demandin' mate!"

"I never see men eat like 'em. Them's the sort of people the Gov'ment leaves us ter deal with."

"Go along back, Jim, and howld yer thrap! Oi'll be there in the marnin'. Oi'll dale wid thim promiscuously."

CHAPTER IV

REPORTS THE UNEXPECTED WHICH HAPPENED TO TROOPER PAT DONEGAN

"The boat is gone!"

Chillon dropped his turkey in amazement, and sat down helplessly beside it.

Jean ran to the spot where they had left the boat, well above high-water mark, and found no trace, no footprint, to show that a stranger had been there. The sand was disturbed where the boat had lain, and that was all. He wandered up and down the beach, and came back marvelling to Chillon.

"She is gone. Some one must have taken her."

"*Ventrebleu!* that is evident. But who?"

"I do not know," Jean answered simply.

The mystery of the occurrence distressed them. Both felt dimly the menace of the Enemy who had followed them from New Caledonia. "It is He!" said Chillon with conviction.

Jean brushed the thought aside all the more decidedly because it had glimmered on his own mind. "Nonsense! It is some people of the country," he said. "They come; they find a boat without an owner; they take it, naturally."

"I would like to strangle them!" said Chillon.

"It does not matter," said Jean, "since we would have had to leave it in any case; yet—I would rather

this had not happened. That boat was our good friend; to lose her makes me feel a little lonely."

Chillon's eyes fell on the turkey; he smiled. "We are not lonely," he said to the turkey fondly, "for we have *you*, my beautiful one! Come, and I will cook you, my treasure! my consolation! Besides, Jean! let our enemies come, now we are at liberty. Come, Monsieur Scaffel! and see how I will treat you!"

Chillon swaggered suddenly to the edge of the sand and collected a pile of jagged stones. Jean followed his movements with interest.

"What are you doing, Antoine?"

"*Cré Dieu!* watch me! Keep your eye on that thin, ragged tree, *mon* Jean; does it remind you of Jeem Scaffel? Look!"

He moistened his palm, stooped forward and flung a stone with terrific force; a piece of bark flew away from the tree. For three minutes he bombarded it, until a white seam appeared round the middle as if it had been rung with an axe.

"*Hein!* a stone is better than a pistol, Jean. A knock—*so! so!*—with a bit of rock is worse than a sabre-cut; is it not? *You* know, my dear turkey! Permit me!"

He disembowelled the bird with the neatness of a professional cook, dipped it in the scrub pool close by and cased it in a coffin of mud, then roasted it in a pile of stones made red-hot in a huge fire. When he took it out of its coffin the feathers peeled off in a mass, leaving the bird white and lovely.

Chillon uttered an ecstatic cry and fell upon his knees before it. He wished to pray.

Yet after supper their thoughts were gloomy again. They felt the eeriness of the vast continent extending behind them for many a thousand miles—foreign, impenetrable, hostile. And the man Scaffles was their enemy; he had threatened them with the law.

"You should have let me deal with him, Jean," said Chillon; "I would have split his throat. I hate him. Not all men can hate like your Chillon. Do you remember Warder Vergniaud—the hog at the building of the sea-wall?"

Jean nodded.

"Do you remember the work he gave me? Not a man's work, but an elephant's. I carried rocks that should have been trucked through the sand. I did it, hoping that he would sicken of persecution. God knows I never wronged the man. The sand was very soft, and some of the rocks as heavy as a man. I used to struggle with the load jagging at my breast, and the sun burning the sores into my bones. And every stone might have been trucked with less labour."

"Yes?" said Jean.

"Then Vergniaud sent me to the nickel mines for a change—*you* know what that is."

Jean nodded.

"My body became covered with pustules; I could not eat. By and by Vergniaud brought me back to the wall. The same picked loads! the same soft sand that gripped my heel at every step and rubbed the rocks across my breast. Vergniaud should have stopped then; he should have patted my back and called me a brave fellow. He would have done these

things if he had possessed the soul of an ape, or the brains of a louse. Instead, he reported me for skulking and my food was stopped—the cur!"

Chillon stopped, thinking, and proceeded.

"I had an idea, Jean. I studied the breakwater inch by inch from the cliff to the water. The rocks were packed to fit closely, and the crevices were filled with cement and small stones. One day I discovered a hole about twenty feet from the landward end, down by the water's edge. It was a mistake of somebody's. The sight of it set my heart leaping. I improved the hole at every chance; I worked the boulders like an engineer, till every stone was brought under control of one pebble about the size of an egg. It was not long before Vergniaud found it out.

"He marched me from the gang and over the cliff. 'Do you see that?' he says, touching the space with his carbine. 'I do not seen anything,' I said meekly. 'Not see anything, you dog!' and he struck me across the mouth. 'Do you not see that gap in the workings? 'Tis big enough to drive a hearse through.' I looked up and down the great wall and shook my head. 'You blind bastard!' he screamed, 'what is this?' and he did what I expected—he crawled into the cavity howling like a dog. 'Can you see it now, liar of a convict?' 'I cannot,' I answered quietly, and kicked away my pebble. The mountain of granite slipped down and dovetailed itself in the hollow beneath. I walked back to the gang and finished my work. An hour after I watched the tide creep and creep over the sands until it licked and gurgled under the wall; I

watched it until the waves had covered the cave from end to end!"

Jean shivered a little; there were times when Chillon frightened him.

Chillon's breath came thickly. "Bah! it was a magnificent end for the scoundrel. How they talked of his disappearance! Nobody ever found out."

Chillon scowled at the memory; but presently smiled and went to sleep calmly.

It was long before sleep came to Jean; and then he dreamed strange dreams. Several times he woke; and once he walked up and down the beach for long. Towards morning he too fell into heavy slumber.

It was an hour after daylight when he was wakened suddenly, and sat up rubbing his eyes, with the feeling that somebody was near them. At the end of the beach, not two hundred yards away, he saw the figure of a man in a peaked cap, leading a horse. He grasped Chillon with a force that woke him at once, complaining.

"Be quiet!" said Jean. "There is danger!"

"Ha!"

Chillon's eyes took in the trooper's figure. He rose and moved nearer to the little cairn of stones that he had collected the night before. The trooper was picking his way carefully. Chillon was hidden from his view. Jean sat still.

The trooper came up along the edge of scrub, and hung his bridle over the branch of a sapling. Jean sat immovable, his face turned seaward, his hands behind his back.

The trooper approached him noisily, his left thumb in his belt, his chin in the air.

"'Tis a quare place to picnic," he said abruptly. "Fwhat business have yez here at all?"

"Am I—hurt you?" inquired Jean without turning.

"Oi have a roight to question," rapped the trooper. "An' see that ye answer civilly, or I'll skin the hide av ye wid me stirrup-iron."

He strode across to the ledge of cliff which had sheltered them, and examined carefully the bit of sail they had slept in and the shreds of clothing that littered the sands. For a moment he held his chin thoughtfully, and the red skin creased over his forehead in an agony of induction.

"Frinch!" he said, wheeling round; and then he observed the recumbent Chillon, and retreated, surprised and angry. "Get up out av that and show yourself, d'ye hear?"

Chillon whistled a bar of a sonata; his hairless face preserved the calmness that is sometimes seen in people who are stone-deaf.

The trooper folded his arms and surveyed him satirically. His half-shaped thoughts were approaching a point towards which the surrounding objects more than hinted.

"Ye are Frinch!" he said harshly, and stopped.

"*Tiens!* It is an Irishman!" growled the little fat convict. "A spy!"

"Yis; that's Frinch gibberish ye're shpakin' now! But"—his right hand briefly indicated the Pacific Ocean—"Oi was thinking by fwhat manner av manes yez came into the country."

Chillon smiled on him encouragingly.

The trooper was silent and fingered his red beard broodingly; then stepped back to Jean; looked him over; looked at his clothes and examined the sail and rags afresh.

His face cleared, he seemed to make up his mind. "Oi'll be obliged if yez'll come wid me. Oi make no charge but vagrancy, understand! 'Twill be more satisfactory if yez explain yerselves in the proper place. There has been too much landin' and philanderin' by strange min from away beyant. Ye'll come wid me now!"

Jean still sat immovable, his face turned to the blue wheel of horizon, indifferent, unconcerned. The trooper blundered forward; his hand shifted behind him and disappeared. Jean moved slightly at the click of the handcuffs. The trooper advanced with a kindling eye and made a movement with his hands.

"*Halte là!*" cried Chillon sharply.

"An' fwhoy shall oi halt?" He leaned forward, his teeth bared in the red rift of his beard. Chillon watched him keenly.

"Oi'm askin' yez to come dacintly and quoietly: the rayson is best known to yerselves. Be civil an' oi'll dale fair wid yez; lift a finger or thry any dog-tricks an' oi'll stretch wan av yez out and drag the other by way av me horse's tail. Stand up, now!"

Chillon loafed to his cairn of stones and rolled up his sleeves with the air of a duellist. He selected a jagged pebble and poised it between his finger and thumb.

The trooper watched him and laughed jeeringly.

"Hands up, now!" He covered Chillon with his revolver.

"Pah! vermin!" Chillon spat in the dust.

The trooper swore in surprise and fired; the bullet threw up a spit of sand beyond the reef.

Chillon laughed contemptuously, his arm went out with a lightning movement, and a jagged pebble struck the red throat full under the chin. The trooper dropped to his knee and fired wildly; a few twigs flew about Jean's head.

Chillon stepped back and lunged forward again, and another stone went home like a bullet, striking the trooper's forehead above the left eye. He fell sideways and down.

Chillon took a deep breath. "*Misérable!* he would have it!"

Jean rose without a word and dragged the body into the scrub. "It was a pity," he said, returning; "but we could not go with him. And what next?"

"There is his horse," said Chillon.

"Yes; there is his horse." He led the animal into the scrub as far as he could; and Chillon heard a shot.

Jean came back with the trooper's revolver and cartridges. "It was the best way," he said simply; "the horse would bring us under suspicion; it is sure to be known."

"Do you think they will find him?" said Chillon.

Jean, busy in effacing every trace of the recent encounter, did not answer for a moment. "They must!" he said presently. "There will be a hue and cry. They will track his horse. They will

search everywhere. But we have a few hours. Let us go quickly. We will get food and gold from Jeem Scaffel."

Chillon recovered his spirits. "Ah, bah!" he said; "time enough to wish the devil good day when we meet him! We are always better off than in La Nouvelle."

They buried the sail in the sand; concealed the traces of their fire; and Jean led the way northward. He mounted the cliff that had sheltered them; passed along the path at the back of the next little promontory; and, coming suddenly out of the scrub on to the sand again, they ran almost into the arms of a white man dressed in white ducks with brass buttons. Behind him was a ship's boat and a crew of lascars. And behind that again, not a quarter of a mile out, the astonished Frenchmen saw a large steam-yacht at anchor.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH PROVIDENCE APPEARS AT THE PRECISE MOMENT WHEN THERE IS NEED OF HIM

THE red-faced man advanced affably. Chillon made a movement to run, reconsidered the matter, and waited anxiously. He could not help casting a look over his shoulder to see whether the beach where the trooper lay was in sight, and his relief to find it blotted out behind the rocky point expressed itself in profuse perspiration.

Jean remained immovable, as always, in the face of what might be danger.

The red-faced man stepped up close. He was dressed in nautical ducks, with brass anchor-buttons; and he regarded the two Frenchmen attentively, a little quizzically. It was one of his peculiarities that his right eye seemed fixed, while his left roved continually. His face was leathery with salt weather; an ugly scar on his left cheek seemed to be writing a chapter in his autobiography. He smiled reassuringly.

"Good morning, gentlemen! Seen any orchids hereaway?"

Jean answered. "Pardon!—I do—not—understand."

"Orchids, I said. Handsome plants, with a flower, and a smell—you couldn't mistake the

smell." While his fixed eye never left Jean, his roving one seemed to scan Chillon from top to toe. Chillon, nervously conscious of worn clothes that looked as if they had been dipped into the sea for a week and hastily dried, writhed visibly under the scrutiny.

Jean, following the stranger's words with close attention, at last grasped his meaning, and indicated his belief that there were plenty of orchids in the scrub.

"Foreigners, eh?" said the red-faced man. "Well, I've been in heaps of places where I was considerable of a foreigner myself. And down on your luck, too, by all appearances. Well, whatever it is, your luck's rosy to mine when I was wrecked in the Solomons, with nineteen cannibal districts to look for grub in—say nineteen chances to one that I was used for grub myself!"

"We—miners," said Jean. "Walked—long way—through—there!" He pointed to the dense scrub straight behind them, while Chillon eyed the red-faced man to see the result of the explanation he judged Jean to be making.

"Miners—of course! How stupid of me not to guess it!" cheerfully responded the apparition in ducks. "I'm a sailor myself. Name of Samuel Byers—old Sam Byers—everybody knows Sam. Skipper by the grace of God and Lady Royal of that yacht out there." He waved seaward with a proprietorial air. "Come ashore orchid-hunting because nothing else will satisfy my lady. And—fancy meeting *you!*"

"Ask him if he needs any sailors," whispered

Chillon, seized with a brilliant idea. "Tell him we want to go to Breesabane, and have no money. Ask him to take us"—a picture of the trooper lying on the sand suddenly flooded Chillon's mental horizon —"ask him for the love of God!"

"Can't be done, sir," retorted the red-faced man, turning his fixed eye suddenly on Chillon. "Excuse me interrupting," he continued in bad French; "but I understand your lingo as well as my own. Picked it up in Nouméa ten years ago," he added, and watched for his effect.

He found it; for Chillon's knees tottered, his face blanched, and he looked round for a stone. The seaman nodded kindly, as if to say, "I thought as much," and proceeded, "Leastways, I think it can't be done; but Lord knows Lady Royal takes such queer ideas into her head; and she *may* take that one—seeing you're, so to speak, stranded."

Jean answered him in French. "We will be very grateful indeed, Monsieur le Capitaine, if the lady would have so much compassion."

"Well, look here!" said the seaman, watching Chillon's pantomime of future gratitude with interest, "I'll ask her, if you like. You help me to gather orchids, and I'll pull over and see. If she'll have you, I'll come back; if she won't have you—well, it's good-bye, Willy, I am gone, and I hope there'll be no bad cheese between us when we meet aloft."

Chillon eagerly led the way to the scrub, taking care to deviate from the beach where the trooper lay; and in an hour they had enough orchids to fill a small hot-house. Then Byers with his crew of

lascars pulled back to the yacht, while the tattered Frenchmen waited with anxious looks at the path they had lately traversed.

The lascars held the boat at the ladder for what seemed to Chillon a period of years; then Byers was seen descending, making encouraging gestures.

"It's all right," he shouted when within hailing distance; "she'll have you—give you a passage to Brisbane and not charge you a dime. And it's a ginger-and-white lady-owner that does a thing like *that* for a couple of stray—miners—on a beach, I tell you."

Chillon gabbled furious thanks, and made for the boat at once. Jean followed him thoughtfully. Somehow he had begun to suspect his malign destiny of interference in the veriest trifles. Yet what malignity could lurk there? Was not this indeed the visible finger of Providence stretched to aid them in their extremity?

"I shall be glad to be permitted to thank Lady Royal for her exceeding kindness," he told Byers in French, when he was seated in the boat.

"She won't see you," said Byers heartily. "Pull away, you sons of black sausages! Wouldn't see *me*. She's sick. I paid my respects and put my question through Miss Aimée. You can thank her, if she'll let you. I've got orders to berth you amidships; I'm the only white man aboard, and you couldn't pig for'ard with *them*." He jerked his chin contemptuously at the straining black oarsmen.

Chillon grunted continual approval; he was overjoyed at the new prospect. Jean listened gravely. He felt a revolt at the part he was playing, the lies

he had to tell. This genial mariner doubtless believed them to be what they said; he had appealed to the yacht-owner for pity;—and Jean regretted the false pretence. He thought of the trooper, and sighed. Perhaps the man was only stunned. Yet—if they had not resisted the trooper they would have been sent back to Nouméa.

"That's Miss Aimée at the rail," chattered Byers volubly; "she's sorry for you—going to pet you like canaries and feed you on lumps of sugar, or my name's not Samuel. But go easy, you know! Don't make a fuss! Old De Quincey isn't in good dream form to-day; she's fidgety. But Miss Aimée will cherish you like a mother. Guess she's the nicest girl that ever tripped up a gangway. Pity she's going blind!"

"Blind?" Jean pricked up his ears with professional interest.

"Yes; I'm afraid so. She seems to get worse every week; but she tells me it's only a dimness that comes and goes. I'll introduce you to her—what's your names?"

Jean had a slight hesitation, which did not escape Byers's wandering eye. The stationary eye immediately glared at the stroke oar to show that Byers had noticed nothing.

"We are called Jean and Antoine. We are French—mining in Australia a long time," Jean added with artless diplomacy.

"Oh, well, Mr. Jean and Mr. Antoine, here we are! Come, and I'll introduce you to Miss Royal. She'll be the richest girl in Australia when old De Quincey pegs out—a matter of two millions, they say."

As the Frenchmen reached the deck, ragged and weather-beaten, Aimée stepped forward to greet them. In front of her a loose rope was swinging from a yard, and a gust of wind caught it and drove it against her face. She staggered a little. Jean stepped up anxiously.

"I trust you are not hurt, Mademoiselle?" he asked gently. His deep earnest voice was almost drowned by Captain Byers's sharp reproof addressed to a cringing lascar aloft.

Aimée drew out her handkerchief, pressing it to her eyes. "It hurt a little . . . but it is nothing. I should have seen it; but I do not see very well to-day."

Jean was too deeply concerned to allow the incident to pass. The instinct of his profession rose in him. He felt suddenly that years of brutal toil had not taken the skill from his fingers.

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle; I was once an oculist. I think your eyelids have been bruised. Permit me! Ah . . . !"

He turned her face to the light, scanning it intently. A slight red mark crossed cheek and eyelid where the rope had struck.

"I didn't think it would smart so." She smiled in his face. "I'm glad my mother wasn't on deck. I fear Captain Byers will make the poor lascar very miserable. Listen!" She half turned to where Byers was speaking slow, hard words to a penitent Mohammedan who was smiting his breast. But Jean did not turn away his glance from her face.

"If the pain irritates or causes you any incon-

venience, Mademoiselle, will you allow me to prescribe?"

Aimée laughed and put away her handkerchief. "I'm sure it will be nothing. And"—she dropped her voice—"if you meet my mother to-morrow or at any time, please don't mention the incident. She worries over trifles that happen to me. And . . . she would lecture the serang and Captain Byers. When my mother lectures we all hide ourselves. Never mind me; tell me of yourselves. Captain Byers informs me that you are Frenchmen who have been mining and have suffered great hardships."

"That is true, Mademoiselle," answered Jean gravely; "my good friend Antoine and I are deeply grateful to you for your kindness in permitting us to travel to Brisbane on your vessel." He indicated Chillon with a paternal gesture; and Chillon grimaced and bowed profoundly.

Aimée was touched at the thought of the sufferings which Chillon's appearance indicated that he had gone through. "I am so sorry for you," she said impulsively, "and I will tell Captain Byers to give you everything to make you comfortable. Good-bye for the present!"

She passed below.

Byers was watching his chance. "Now, my lads, just go with that steward, and get fitted out;—and I dare say you wouldn't object to a square meal. Then you can come up on deck and tell me how you like it."

The Frenchmen followed the steward to a luxurious two-berth cabin; and gladly accepted the offer of a hot bath. When they came on deck again, after a

hearty dinner, dressed in new sea-clothes, Chillon could not resist the pleasure of nudging Jean in the ribs. Jean turned. Chillon nudged him again and, without saying a word, winked portentously. Jean understood. "Poor Antoine! I am glad you are happy."

. . . . .

They found the vessel under way and speeding down the coast at an easy ten-knot speed. The scene of their recent exploits was already left behind. Jean sighed thankfully, and looked back, standing by the starboard bulwarks. The change in their condition since the morning seemed astounding. He inwardly blessed the Fates that had delivered him from the hells of Nouméa into this millionaire's paradise. All his suspicions had fled when he saw Aimée: surely she was an angel come to bring promise of better fortune to a ruined man. Yet they would need to be very careful when they reached Brisbane. It was most fortunate that the millionaire's caprice had favoured them. No one would dream of looking for two French convicts aboard her yacht.

He looked up to see Aimée stepping towards him, a little uncertainly; and turned to her respectfully. She was dressed in soft white; a single diamond burned in the brooch under her full throat, a turquoise ring drew the eye down to her white dimpled hand. She looked very young and sweet.

"I hope they have made you comfortable, Monsieur Jean," she said in French, smiling brightly at him.

"We feel as if we had entered Aladdin's palace,"

answered Jean; "we are too much indebted to you."

She shook her forefinger at him prettily. "But you must not thank me. Indeed, it was my mother who gave permission for you to come aboard." She clasped her hands before her and turned her face to the south-east breeze.

"We thank her from our hearts," said Jean. "And will you permit me to say how glad I am that you were not hurt by that rope. The mark has almost gone."

"Yes, I hardly feel it now, thank you."

"You have had some trouble with your eyes, have you not?" continued Jean—almost loudly, so as to keep down any ring of pity that might creep into his voice.

Aimée started slightly. "I can hardly distinguish anything to-day. The strong lights of the sea are making me worse. Everything grows blurred and shapeless now. Yet only a few days ago I was able to read quite well."

Jean glanced at her steadily. It was so long since he had looked upon so beautiful a face, so long since he had viewed anything but prison walls, and the sullen visages of murderous convicts. Aimée turned to him fearlessly, and through a blurred vista saw a tall, grave, dark-skinned man with deep, melancholy eyes—clearly a gentleman. His voice reminded her of some one—she could not remember whom. A tiny crease lined her smooth brow. She wanted to see him more clearly, and she could not. It was a little irritating.

"You are pitying me already, Monsieur Jean!"

Her voice quivered. "I am beginning already to fear the dark. How horrible it must be to be blind! But I am sure to get better, they say."

Jean did not answer her immediately. His big hospital at Boileau rose before him with startling clearness; the ivy-clad wings, the wide beech avenue under a wet, grey sky, with the rain chirping and spluttering under the eaves. He could have named half the blind men and women who once crossed the world to consult him. He could have told her of the children who had sat on his knee with their sightless eyes upturned that he might make them see. He leaned towards her and pressed his fingers across her temple, regarding her keenly. She did not shrink, she understood the sudden action.

"I have met blind people who have been very happy. But you have not been treated by a specialist?"

"I have only become bad quite lately; and in Sydney I was treated by our best Australian man. But this voyage has not done me good."

She caught sight of Chillon prowling near them, chuckling softly, with his right hand resting absently on the last button of his waistcoat; "I think your friend wishes to speak to you." She gave him a little nod of adieu.

Chillon sidled up, smoking a cigar. "I have been talking to the captain," he said. "This little ship is—what is it that you say?—a lotus-eater, a millionaire's toy. Monsieur Byers is a quick man, full of sea talk—the north wind, the east wind, the wind that blows from the south. He called me—ha, ha, —'Ole man!' 'Shek han'!' says he. 'I am dam

glad to see you.'" And then Chillon had his business in five minutes. "There is this millionaire-woman down below—she is dying of ennui and opium. I wish I had her francs. I would die of something more pleasant."

Jean thought of Aimée's eyes, and sighed.

CHAPTER VI

STATES THE PERPLEXITY OF SAMUEL BYERS, FIRST-CLASS NAVIGATING MAN

Captain Byers reiterated his injunctions to the lascar serang to mind his steering and call him if he sighted sail or smoke; cast one comprehensive look around; and went into his cabin.

"Guess he won't go hitting the geography," he said. "So we've got a clear hour for a yarn, Matilda; and I'll tell you all about it."

It did not at first appear who Matilda was; but after Byers had locked his door he unlocked the enormous sea-chest which filled up one end of his cabin, raised the lid against the partition, unlocked the till with a smaller key which was hung round his neck by a bit of rope-yarn, drew forth a battered chronometer-case, and finally unlocked that. He was a great man for locks, was Captain Byers.

Having carefully dusted the chronometer-case, he drew his wicker chair to the table, and sat down opposite—his deity. For the ancient chronometer which lived in the case was Captain Byers's fetish, and his curious regard for it marked the one weak spot in an eminently sane and practical mind. His wife had given it to him twenty years before, when he was starting on a voyage which ended in a disastrous shipwreck whence nothing was saved but

Byers and the chronometer. When he finally reached England, he found that his wife was dead —her mother said she died of grief when Byers's absence confirmed the tale of the *Mary Powell's* loss with all hands.

Byers proved that he was an unusual kind of sailor by never quite recovering from the shock of the news. He left the little street in Liverpool with his chronometer ticking inside his shirt, but he never wound it for a long time. Thenceforth it was dead mechanism, an emblem of his dead wife. But as the long years passed, it gradually became alive again, in the sense that Byers worshipped it and confided in it—telling it all his secrets, asking its advice before undertaking a new enterprise, and endowing it by degrees with the personality of a woman whom all the rest of the world had forgotten.

On this occasion Byers took Matilda reverently out of her case, and wound her up with the quarter-turn which made her alive and conversational for an hour or thereabouts. In her ticking he heard the very tones of his dead wife talking to him.

"Well, Matilda!" said Byers, sitting back in his chair and regarding the chronometer solemnly, "now that we've got our freight aboard and are on the return voyage, what do you make of it?"

Matilda's faint observations were plainly an utterance of her complete incapacity to make anything of it; and Byers proceeded, in the cautious tone of shipmate disclosing an impending mutiny to shipmate, to remark that, after three big wrecks and nine small ones, a cannibal feast with himself cooking for the joint, a marooning, a reasonable bit

of piracy, and a quite unreasonable quantity of knock-about seafaring experience in all kinds of strange craft, as regarding that there craft they called the *Aimée*, he was as far out of his reckoning as if he had scudded for a week in front of a seventy-four-knot typhoon.

"Orders to go under easy speed from Brisbane to Thursday Island with Miss Aimée, and spend a fortnight on the voyage, while old De Quincey sheers off to Lord-knows-where with Delisle on the *Imaun*. Sealed orders to be opened on Thursday; you and I opened them, Matilda—and we cruise slowly down the coast to Townsville, keeping out of sight of land as much as possible, and permitting nobody to go ashore. Then dodge about to the eastward, keeping a sharp look-out for the *Imaun*. And we did it, as you know, Matilda. The *Imaun* comes sailing up from Lord-knows-where. We take aboard Lady Royal, and her ugly brute of a dwarf, and her dumb animal of a woman, and her precious case of corpse; and off goes Delisle to Lord-knows-where again. Old lady sweet as a gun for a wonder, with a mouth full of molasses. Orders to keep off and on for three days, then go up and down the coast with a telescope, looking for castaways. We do it, Matilda; we find those blessed castaways. And what next? Orders to watch for a chance to steal their boat—a dirty trick, Matilda, though my name *is* Sam Byers. After we've sent the boat adrift, orders to take a crew ashore in a casual God-forsaken kind of way and look for orchids, lovely orchids. She looked devilish when she said 'orchids,' Matilda. *And* orders to offer the castaways

a passage down to Brisbane, but not to seem eager about it; to make it a kind of act-of-God rescue, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for a millionaire's yacht to go picking up—what? French convicts, Matilda, as *we* know—red-hot from Nouméa; and one of 'em a fat little beast that you couldn't scrub clean with a bucket of sand and turpentine. I reckon the wind says 'Phew!' every time it blows on him.

"Well, we do it all; do it neat and shipshape, with Miss Aimée smiling like a figurehead of innocence all the time; and we've got 'em aboard. I go and report all's well, and the old witch she says, 'Ah, Byers, I thank you. I shall not forget, not forget!'—and cackles like a coopful of geese—and asks how they look, what they say, especially the big cove, and tells it all over to her Chow with the tears rolling down her cheeks. Orders to go full-speed to Brisbane; and that's all the orders I'm likely to get for a while, Matilda, for Lady Royal's off on a big opium-razzle—which means she's deaf, blind, and won't speak.

"And what I want to know, Matilda, is your opinion as a sensible woman and a loving wife to me, what in thunder game is old De Quincey up to now? Hey?"

Byers rested his elbows on the table, his chin on his hands, and regarded the chronometer questioningly. It ticked away briskly, and Byers listened with attention.

"Well," he said, "I'm bound to say that's somewhere in the latitude of my own opinion. 'You're in a good berth, Sam,' says I; 'you're asked to do

works of charity and mercy, whether it's rotten plates or sound iron under the paint, so you just stow your tongue and keep your eyes aloft and pocket your dollars.' Just what I was telling myself, old girl. Obey orders, and watch that the fat gaol-bird doesn't steal the copper off our bottom. I'm proud you agree with me, 'Tilda; it's a big help to have a good woman's notions of a course when you're navigating unknown waters, and that's a fact. So here's for luck, my dear!"—he kissed the chronometer face with a husky smack—"and good-bye till I see you again!"

But when Byers had put the chronometer away in snug secrecy, and locked till and chest, he did not go on deck immediately. He dropped into his chair again and lighted his pipe with the air of a man who felt himself (now that Matilda could not see him and take offence) thoroughly puzzled. And he set himself to review the events of the last two months in the light of that day's proceedings.

One warm day a few weeks previously several seafaring men hung about the Brisbane offices of Royal and Co., and at intervals a spruce young clerk appeared in the doorway making signals for an old man of the sea to enter. One by one the number decreased until only a red-faced mariner with a pipe and a seedy bo's'n-like person with a black eye occupied the kerb.

An advertisement had appeared in both morning papers stating that Royal and Co. were in need of a competent navigator, one accustomed to the Australian coast preferred. The competent navigator

with the black eye turned occasionally towards the mariner with the pipe to exchange glances of infinite mistrust.

"Why ain't the business owned by a man, Sam?—that's what I'm after. Why ain't it owned by a man?" He turned his dubious eye on the mariner with the pipe, breathed loudly, and filled the air with delicate hints of rum. "A woman ain't got no rights owning a business like this—I'm in two minds not to wait my turn. I've never had any good come to me from wimmen yet."

The red-faced man with the pipe heaved his big shoulders doubtfully. "Dunno why she owns anything, my son, but I guess I'd like to run her painted jigger. Went and had a look at the craft this morning early—narrow-chested little hooker she is; Clyde-built, and Clyde-engined: bet there's no deal boards in her cabins—all tit-willow, my son, and Burmese teak—I can smell it."

"Well, you ain't got the billet yet, Byers; don't crow. *You* inquire—after me; I was here first." The mariner with the black eye edged to the office door so that he could be at hand when the spruce clerk beckoned.

Byers shook himself like a big dog and laughed. "Go in first, my son, by all means; but you won't fit De Quincey any more than the others. It's my watch; and I'm on deck, sonny. I'm poorer than a Chinky wharf-rat, but I'm skinning the Board o' Trade this burst. In you go, Joe!"

The spruce clerk appeared at the door and beckoned sharply. The bos'n with the black eye vanished from the kerb. Byers knocked the ashes

from his pipe and carefully brushed a speck of dirt from his frayed serge coat.

Captain Byers had figured conspicuously before the Marine Board of more than one Australian port. It was generally conceded that he would run his vessel to Hades for a cargo of lost souls providing there were dividends and good holding-ground at the entrance of Styx. Certain wharfingers who loafed on Northern harbour-piers hinted that he had appeared in the notorious Dimboola salvage conspiracy; also that the hand of Byers could be traced to the grounding of the S.S. *City of Caledon* when that magnificent coaster deposited her cargo of pianos and patent medicines on Sunday Reef. He was a hard, but not altogether unscrupulous man, was Byers. Of late decent and indecent shipping people had given him a wide berth; but Byers knew that his knowledge of the Islands was second to no man's; and he had heard strange tales of Lady Royal in far-away ports, and liked her none the worse for them. If he only got the chance, he felt that he was the man for her notorious ladyship. So——

Again the spruce young clerk appeared and made his signal. Byers put away his pipe and heaved himself through the swinging door that shut in a line of busy accountants. The clerk conducted him through to an inner room and motioned towards a door half concealed with drapings.

"You may go in," he whispered. "Step lightly, please!"

Byers took a long breath and entered. Lady Royal was sitting bolt upright before a wide ma-

hogany table. A chart was spread before her; an air of business hardened her vulture's face.

"Are you the last?" She looked at him once and then at the chart; but Byers felt the masterful spirit shadowed in her eyes. He bent his head respectfully.

"Lady," he said huskily, "I am the last."

"The last of the Tritons," she mused. "The first said he was an Englishman; the second had sailed from New Orleans to somewhere in a canvas boat; another had spent eight years on an uninhabited island. What is your name?"

"Samuel Byers, my lady."

"What have you done, Samuel Byers, that you hope to be a captain of mine?"

He drew a deep breath. "Lady, I have been seafaring for thirty-five years; and I can show you as good a set of discharges as ever man carried. I'm sorry to say my certificate's suspended at present; but if I can get a ship that will be all right. Last berth I had was on a labour schooner—and I had the misfortune to have a bit of a row with my supercargo, and he went overboard. Fair fight, my lady; they cleared me at the inquiry, but suspended me on a mean excuse. But that's neither here nor there." He took another breath and waited.

Calphurnia did not look up immediately; when she did Byers felt that her thin jaws had relaxed. "Captain Byers, my yacht crews are what you would call lascars. I mention it so that you will not confound educated Mohammedans with Erromango kanakas." She stopped his reply with an

uplifted forefinger. "Do you ever go to church, Samuel?"

The captain scratched his head. "I guess I don't go in often, lady, but I used to listen to them holy men skiting in the Sydney Domain."

"Have you ever been hungry?"

"Lady, I was reasonably hungry yesterday; if I don't fit your yacht I guess I'll hunger some more."

The monocle measured him again and again. She sat back suddenly and her fingers beat a tattoo on the table. "Captain Byers, I wish my daughter to winter in the north. You will do her bidding in all things; her word is my word. Are you sure you are a competent navigator?"

Byers fumbled and brought from his pocket a string-tied packet. She stopped him with an impatient gesture. "I don't want to see certificates. I will ask you a few questions." Had he watched her closely he might have seen the malicious wrinkles gathering about her mouth.

In the intervals between many disasters Byers had faced all manner of Boards, but this grey sneering witch sifted and winnowed him until his general ignorance made him feel humble and ashamed. He could have named every landmark between Penang and Thursday Island, every light between Thursday and the South head; he could have traced on her open chart nearly every reef and passage in Oceania. But it seemed that her fancy led her into veins of thought that were to him irregular and unseamanlike.

"Turn away," she said sharply; "I want to see

your back and shoulders. My daughter's life must be in the keeping of a strong man."

The captain pivoted meekly and straightened his wide shoulders.

"How old are you, Samuel?"

"Fifty or thereabouts, my lady."

"And you say that you have hungered on the sea?" Her fingers cracked as she wrung her hands over the chart. Byers permitted his fist to rest on the table.

"Lady, in the Gilberts eight years ago I had a leaky canoe, three biscuits a day, and ten hungry kanakas watching me ready to tear 'em crumb by crumb from my throat."

Calphurnia smacked her lips; the malicious grin widened. "You may tell me your history some day. The sea interests me. The tales of men who hunger on it drive away my ennui. Ha, I have dreamt of a man lying at the bottom of a boat, rotting, rotting, eating out his heart. Hush! do not speak to me. I dream sometimes, sometimes. . . . The sea!"

She made a gesture. "You may go. Come to-morrow. Good day, Captain Byers!"

Byers stumbled through the outer office, between the lines of clerks, with his hat in his hands, and blinked for a minute in the light outside the swing-door before he remembered to put it on. He felt very humble.

The sight of the melancholy mariner with the black eye brought him to himself. "Well," said that personage, stepping closer, "and how did you get on? I reckoned I'd wait and hear."

"See here, my son!" Byers paused, lit his pipe, and viewed the other through a vista of smoke. "I guess I'm to be rear-admiral in this company's service." He jerked his hand in the direction of Calphurnia's room. "She's considering me. And I'll bet you two hells to one that I navigate Miss Royal up and around the Barrier."

The other groaned. "It's just your luck, Byers; and just mine. I never had any luck where a woman was concerned. The sex has been my ruin, Sam." He shook his head woefully, and lumbered off to the river-side.

. . . . .

The rest was in Byers's recent dreams. He had been engaged next day, and put in charge of the yacht, with instructions to pay off the three white members of the crew, and get lavish stores for a three months' cruise. When he came aboard the *Aimée*, Byers met Captain Stokes, whom he was replacing; and was informed that Stokes was spending his days and nights wondering what the change meant.

"She just grinned at me, old man," he told Byers confidentially; "and she says, says she, 'Captain Stokes, you've been a good captain for me for three years past; and now I'm going to give you a holiday. You need a holiday; and you're too good a captain to run with risks in these days of newspapers. So you'll just lay up for a while until I want you, and your pay will go on just the same.'

"As if I wanted her —— pay," exploded the angry Stokes. "Not that I don't want it; and o' course it's treating me handsomely; but I don't un-

derstand it. I says to her, says I, 'Is it any reflection on me, Lady Royal?' And she says, says she, 'No reflection at all, Captain Stokes; it's just as I say. I think too highly of you to run any risks with you.' What she meant by that, Mr. Byers, the Lord may know; but I don't. And by the whale that ran away with Jonah, I'd give my buttons to understand it," he concluded vehemently.

Byers opened his mouth and shut it again vacantly, to signify that he could give no help; and the other continued:

"And I hear that you're sacking the engineer, and my mate, and the bo's'n. That so?"

Byers signified that was so.

"Well, you won't have a white face aboard her, bar your own. Not that the blacks aren't reliable, if all goes well; but if things go badly, Mr. Byers, you look out for squalls, for you've only got yourself to depend on."

Then the disconsolate Stokes got his dunnage over the side and departed.

And that was the state of the case as Captain Byers puzzled over it.

CHAPTER VII

RUNS STEAMING DOWN THE QUEENSLAND COAST

Captain Byers came on deck with his fingers working violently, his forehead wrinkled and sullen. He had made an end of meditation.

"I'll pump the little fat one," he muttered; "and see what comes up from the bilges. The other one won't talk."

He found Chillon forward, inspecting a circle of lascars eating their meal.

Chillon saluted, a severe military salute.

"You have been in the army," said Byers in his bad French, shaking his head vigorously.

"No, no, dear captain, not in the army. *Fichtre!* I am not tall enough. The devil take the army!" Chillon rolled forward fearlessly, and slapped him on the back.

Byers grimaced pleasantly, and swore under his breath. "Have a cigar!" he said sharply, offering his case.

Chillon's face creased into innumerable smiles. "Ten million thanks!" he said, with his hand on his heart. "Accept my eternal gratitude!"

Byers grunted. "Yes; but you'll be tired of this before another day goes. Glad to reach Brisbane!"

Chillon struck an attitude. "Impossible!" He converted the attitude into the business of striking a match, and listened attentively. This strange

animal of a ship captain seemed affable; perhaps he would say something useful.

"Too d——d monotonous, cruising like this," growled Byers, giving Chillon a confident dig in the ribs. "I want excitement. I like to smell hell about once a fortnight, and here you find me picknicking with a couple of ladies. It doesn't suit Byers. Give me the Islands where there are no drawing-rooms; give me the woman that don't hustle you for etiquette."

Chillon sighed responsively. "*Sacré!* yes. The Islands! Do I not love them!"

"What Islands?" questioned Byers, with a far-away look at the smoke trailing astern.

Chillon's brow became wrinkled with thought. He lingered on the words. "*Ventrebleu!* let me think. Yes; Batavia. We were carrying copra from Opolu."

Captain Byers knelt on the deck and drew an imaginary line with his finger. "Here's Opolu in the Navigators. You make your casting so, and fetch Espiritu Santo. If you are a labour schooner you can get niggers and fill your hold; if you want trade there's copra, always copra. Failing that, you can do the New Caledonia run—nickel-ore and whatever God sends. After that you hog round Torres Straits and fetch the Java Sea. Here's Batavia!" Captain Byers drew a large circle on the deck and looked at it dreamfully. "That's Batavia." He eyed it regretfully and took Chillon's arm, and the two sauntered up to the bows.

"My crew is pretty mixed, Monsieur Antoine; Chinese engineers; Chinese cooks; the rest lascars.

They're humble; I always make 'em humble and swift from the jump. They come aboard fairly stinking with notions, and it takes me about ten minutes to knock it out of 'em with a handspike."

Chillon turned and glanced along the snowy deck under the sun-awning.

"Nothing cheap about this little hooker," grinned Byers, following his eye. "You'll find everything in Queen Victoria style from keel to masthead. Our owner's the richest woman in the southern hemisphere. She doesn't look over cheerful, though. But you can't name her trouble."

"Opium, you said," Chillon reminded him politely.

"Your finger's on it. She's lying stiff now; but when she's right she's worth seeing, though you mightn't think it. I'll bet you never heard a wittier woman outside a variety show; seems to me as if the drug greased her brain; her mouth is as full of smartness as an egg is full of egg. Better come below," he added, "and have a drink."

Chillon followed downstairs into a saloon that set his thief's fingers itching. The floor was covered with a pile of azure velvet that cast a sky-coloured reflection in the panelled mirrors above; the walls held masterpieces by French painters.

Chillon heaved a sigh. "Monsieur Byers! you are fortunate to have this palace to sit in."

Byers shook his head despondently. "I'd rip out all this truck if I had my way and give it a healthy coat of whitewash. I come down here sometimes after my watch, and the queer smell of the place sickens me. Old De Quincey drenches the floor

with all the stinking smells of Asia. It's pretty rough on a man that's accustomed to the four winds of heaven." He opened a gold-mounted wine-case and emptied a bottle of creaming champagne into glasses.

"It isn't all beer and skittles on this craft," he went on gloomily. "How I envy your fat-backed skippers who tramp their little coffins up and down the 'Pelago, living like pigs and with nothing in the world to wish for. Not that I'm complaining, you know. Thought myself mighty lucky to get the berth."

Chillon flung himself on a Persian rug and closed his eyes ecstatically.

Byers looked at him cautiously, and sat back in his chair, his fingers drumming the table. "There's an island lower down, Crow's Nest we call it, and one morning about three years ago, as we were beating up, I saw a pillar of smoke lifting behind the reef. 'Some poor castaways have set up shop,' says I, and ordered my first mate to go over in the dinghy and report. About an hour after, he came back, with his men pulling like blazes. 'What's up?' says I. 'Castaways, sure enough,' he raps out. 'One whale-boat and four gentlemen from Nouméa. They're wolfish hungry, sir, and one of them came over the reef tearing up a crow. They're in a fearful plight, sir,' he says, 'and it would be a godsend to leave some biscuit and meat. They're perishing,' says he."

"And did you leave them anything, captain?" Chillon held up his wine to the light; the yellow beads trembled against the rim.

"I did," cried Byers with sudden harshness. "And I sent for the police-boat too. One of them was a gentleman—Pierre something——"

"Brougaud," exclaimed Chillon, intent on the story.

Byers swung round. "That's the name, sure enough. Now how did you find out that, might I ask, Monsieur Antoine?"

Chillon laughed nervously. "I read of him in the papers. They were shipped back to Nouméa, and each man received ten years on his former sentence. Was it not severe? You would not blame them for making a dash for liberty."

Byers shook his head disparagingly. "The best of 'em would slit your gizzard for a drop of absinthe. If I struck a shop of 'em to-morrow, I'd run 'em into port and hand 'em over to the police."

"Certainly," said Chillon, coughing a little.

"Suppose we go on deck and see what our mate is up to?" said Byers with a sudden change of manner. And without waiting for an answer he led the way to the stairs and tripped up nimbly. At the top he turned to shake his fist at the unseen figure behind. "I'm sure of you now," he muttered; "and if it wasn't for Lady Royal I'd have a policeman aboard as soon as we get into the river. I knew you for a gaol-bird as soon as I clapped eyes on you." Chillon's head appeared with the eyes upturned in a beaming smile; and Byers strode off hastily.

Chillon reached the deck, and stood a moment to gaze after the retreating figure. He had not been

duped. Byers was his enemy. He sought for Jean to confide his apprehensions; but could not find him.

Jean had slipped below to his cabin and opened the tiny port. A smell of violets haunted the snow-white sheets inside the cedar bunk; it was inexpressibly sweet. Surely a woman's hand had touched the pillow. Miss Royal's hand, perhaps.

Jean covered his face; for a moment it seemed to him that his body was unworthy to lie where her gentle hand had lingered; it seemed a gross, carnal thing to mate the spotless linen with his bruised body—bruised and lashed by his prison tormentors.

His eyes quailed at sight of his own beaten flesh. No; he could not lie in that bed; a bit of straw, a block of wood would give him more ease. In a few days he would be free in an Australian city, if they could escape the police. They *must* escape the police. The mere thought of being sent back to Nouméa turned him sick with horror.

He drew the trooper's revolver from his pocket and examined it carefully; it held two cartridges—more than enough to put him beyond the reach of prisons.

The sound of a piano came from some adjacent cabin. Jean was not a musical enthusiast, but the haunting pathos of the theme filled him with a desire to see the player. Was it the half-blind girl who was not afraid of him? the girl who had not cried out when Barradas the convict touched her with his hand?

He threw himself back and closed his eyes. The ecstasy of the music struck him sharply; the trembling deeps of its pathos swept over him like a

breath of tragedy—it was a voice, a pitying human voice quivering with genius, burning with the pain that comes into every man and woman's life. It was more than he could bear. His door opened softly. Chillon thrust his hairless face inside.

"Ah, dear Barradas, so you are here! Do you hear that playing? Is it not magnificent? supreme? *Ma foi*, I thought I could play. *Fichtre!* I am wooden, a blockhead."

Jean looked at his companion and sighed.

"I was listening, too, my comrade; I was wondering if it were Miss Royal."

"She is magnificent," reiterated Chillon. "*Bigre!* it is a pity that she is half blind. Such a player has Chillon's pity. You must look at her eyes, Jean! *Hein!* it was your game once; you have not forgotten the old business?"

Chillon swung his fat limbs from the bunk and looked important.

"I have not forgotten," answered Jean absently. "I did not presume that she wanted my services."

"But what! Jean, you should not be slow to do a lady a service. I will speak to her. She will not repulse Chillon. I will introduce myself with this." He drew his flute from his inside pocket and regarded it lovingly.

For half a minute the crashing seas drowned Aimée's adagio, and when the silence fell again she had changed her theme. Handel claimed her, and the very waves seemed to withhold their clamour to listen.

"*He was despised! He was rejected!*"

And the pity in each flawless note came to them

in pleading waves of sound—echoes of the Master's sorrow nourished and preserved in the alembic of Aimée's mind.

"*He was despised! He was rejected!*"

It seemed like a voice calling to them through eighteen centuries. Chillon lifted his hands to the white beam above his head. "If I had not crossed the Pacific I should not have heard that. *Cré Dieu!* Chillon is compensated for his hunger and thirst. I have heard Rubinstein; yes, I have heard Liszt";—he snapped his fat fingers; there was a tremor on his thick lips;—"and they could not torment me so. Eh, Jean, do you feel a little of the fire that burns from her fingers? She is magnificent! magnificent!"

He rolled from his seat like a drunkard disturbed, reached the door, and blundered from the cabin without wishing Jean good night.

Two days passed by slowly. Jean rarely went on deck; a fear had come upon him that he might meet the white-haired opium-smoker, and the thought kept him awake till he leaped shuddering from his bunk and locked the cabin door. He tried to reason out the cause of his repugnance. Perhaps she was a kindly woman weakened by an excessive use of the drug. He wished to thank her. But Captain Byers's vivid description had filled him with instinctive antipathy.

Often he mused over the sudden change in their fortunes. To be lifted thus from the torturing ocean and dropped into a floating palace was a transition startlingly unreasonable. Sometimes he

still woke to scenes of the life-in-death of Nouméa. André's voice would come back with alarming clearness. "Take care! you dog! Spy! I would smash your ugly head if it were dark!" A grey sea-wall, a cloud of gulls drowsing beyond the fort, leaped across his memory. The clamour of a gong from Lady Royal's quarters was like the booming of a cannon across the ghastly Island.

He was deeply grateful for Miss Aimée's innocent confidence. She spoke to him whenever she saw him on deck; but for long periods she remained below; and when she came up she looked white and worn. Jean surmised that her mother's illness troubled her.

There were hours when Jean paced the narrow confines of the forecastle, his dreaming eyes scarce noting the black smoke wreaths that hung in the wake of the occasional coasters. Hatred slumbered in his heart—to be awakened when Chillon by word or gesture recalled their days of bondage.

The Barrier Islands had vanished one by one, and every hour brought him nearer to the city where he could bury his identity in the crowd. Keppel Bay had been left behind, and signs of civilisation appeared along the coast. Steamers passed them in lazy succession. Dark promontories became suddenly illumined when the sun dropped in the west. Byers told him that within twenty-four hours they would be entering Moreton Bay.

Sometimes Aimée came forward and sat in the shadow of the poop. She wondered innocently why Jean never spoke of France, mentioned no names, gave her no clue to his family, told nothing beyond

the fact that he had studied medicine and had practised as an oculist. She wondered if he had sons or daughters, and was afraid to ask, fearing lest she might touch some hidden depths of pain.

There was something in his melancholy that wrung pity from her quick, responsive nature. She had identified the memory that he brought her; he reminded her of Paul. It was very strange that this deep-voiced man should recall the joyous young stowaway who was keeping accounts and mustering cattle on Barcroft Downs. Jean had suffered, she was very sure; she had seen once the fierce light of terror on his swarthy visage; and again a gloomier look which she could not define. Jean could have told her it was the look of unsatisfied revenge.

At evening on the second day Jean asked the captain's permission to overhaul his stock of drugs. Byers responded with alacrity, and led him into a store-room stocked like a well-appointed chemist's shop. He liked Monsieur Jean as much as he disliked Monsieur Antoine. He gripped a big cheroot between his teeth; his red face shone with enthusiasm.

"Guess you ought to give old De Quincey a little thunder-and-lightning, Doctor; she's got more disease in her than a quack advertisement."

Jean ran his eye along the rows of blue and white glass bottles that seemed to stare at him with familiar faces; each inscription recalled a page of his old life—the white stone hospital at Boileau, the blind men and women who once crowded into his waiting-room.

The cigar-smoke hung around the captain's lips

and drifted lazily out the door into the broad lane of sunshine between the awnings.

"Bet you're going to fix up Miss Aimée's eyes, Doctor. Guess you won't find it a hard job."

"Miss Royal permitted me to see her eyes to-day. Her case is very simple; but the cure will take time." Jean inserted a strip of litmus paper into a red-labelled phial and held it up to the light.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLS HOW JEAN BARRADAS SAW MEDUSA'S HEAD

Aimée descended the wide stairs that led to her mother's state-room, and entered without sound. A black pall covered the sepulchre of Imaun, towering like a dromedary inside its four brass rails. Calphurnia was lying face down on the floor, her white mane bristling about her lean neck and shoulders. She made no movement, but her roused ear had caught the *weep-weep* of her daughter's dress.

"Sit near me, my sweet! my body aches for thy touch. Hold me, Aimée, my heart is numb and bound with a ring of iron. My pulse is dying; I feel as if a bat had sucked my veins. What day is this?"

Aimée knelt and whispered beside the grizzled head, holding the death-cold hands against her own warm breast.

"Are we nearing port, my sweet?"

"We are near the entrance to the Bay, mother. To-morrow we shall be home again. Shall I ring for coffee?"

"No, no; do not move from me, Aimée, my blood answers to thine. Dost know, dear, I think that if I lay dead, thou couldst wake me with thy warm hands. Such hands as thine had thy father. There was life, too, on his lips."

She moved to her elbow and looked into her

daughter's face. "Tell me about the man who came aboard, my sweet."

"There are two men, mamma."

"Yes, yes; but I mean the man—the man of sorrow, the man with the brow of tempest and the eyes of a child." She crouched over with her chin in Aimée's lap, shivering and agog.

Aimée sighed. "I think he has been unfortunate; his hands are scarred and torn. Yesterday the wind blew open his shirt collar, and oh, mother! I saw a weal across his neck—I think it must be the mark of a lash. And he is a good man, I am sure. The frightful shame of it!"

Aimée covered her face. If Calphurnia had looked at her she might have seen tears on her daughter's lashes, tears for the man who looked at Aimée with Paul's eyes. But Calphurnia had other thoughts; her lean body hugged itself in silent ecstasy.

"A lash mark, my sweet? Ha! the knouter flogged high. Under the neck did you say? What pain!—what pain! Such whippings happen in Russia. I have seen men and women stripped for it at Irkutsk. You do not describe the man's scars, Aimée. Were they crossed and cris-crossed, or only straight red weals?"

Aimée shuddered. "Hush, mother! please don't talk of that."

Calphurnia stroked the carpet like a pantheress at play. "You say he is not happy. Do you think that he is happier than I?"

"How can I judge, mother? I have only known him a little while."

"I should like to see him, my sweet, to ask him about his sufferings." She sat upright, her nails biting into her flesh. "I should like him to come down here. Let Byers fetch him now! now! I must look at the man who has suffered, I must know that he has suffered, I must hear it from his lips."

Aimée crossed the saloon obediently and passed out, closing the door that might let in a dangerous draught.

Calphurnia drew herself upright, swaying forward and holding her pulsing temples. The room was almost dark. She chuckled softly, crowed like an infant; her hands wandered along the rail that guarded Imaun's sepulchre, and the contact quickened her opium-soddened brain. She pressed the velvet pall to her lips, crooning an Arab chant that she had learned in the tents of a caravan for Mecca. She had sung it to Imaun at Alexandria; and each line recalled the day when she had flung herself on the blood-drenched sheets in the hotel at Paris, bruising his dying lips with hers. Imaun, the father of Aimée, bulleted by this dog Barradas! At a touch the pall fell back; the lights sprang up, revealing Imaun in his ship-coffin, eternally calm. Calphurnia's eyes filled with tears as she gazed.

A bevelled mirror caught her eye; it reflected a canine head with a moving jowl. She turned and saw it and shrank behind Imaun's sepulchre.

"Not like that! Not like that! ah, no, no!" She stabbed at the reflection with her shut fist, but the face glowered like Hate from the mirrors, a tearless, bristling, animal head.

A heel clinked on the brass-sheeted stairs outside.

"Begone, Tam!" She rose; drew down the pall; and moved to a couch.

"*Tap! tap!*"—and silence.

Calphurnia huddled on the couch and moistened her lips.

"*Tap! tap!*"

"Come in!" She choked it out and tossed back her head.

Jean Barradas stepped inside and stared at the mirrors that radiated the lights from the dim candelabra in the ceiling.

The grotesque shapes on the painted tapestry caught his eye. Then he saw a woman who might have been a hundred years old. He bent his head respectfully and then waited for her to address him.

"I sent for you because you would not come voluntarily."

She whispered her words in French, and her long chin pecked at every syllable. Jean bowed humbly.

"Madam, I fear that I have transgressed in taking passage on your private yacht. But my comrade and myself are most grateful." He stopped and drew a long breath.

"You need not be grateful!" Her mouth wrenched itself into a smile. "You look distressed. Are you in trouble? Ha!" She checked him with an uplifted finger. "Do not start by denying me, Doctor; we shall soon understand. You are French, of course?"

"Yes, Madam!"

"You have escaped from New Caledonia." He looked across with a frightened stare. But she did

not give him time to speak, and her laugh was almost reassuring.

"Tell me, Doctor, tell me all!"

Jean looked puzzled. Years of brutal toil had not sharpened his wits; constant association with the brainless ruffians of Nouméa had dulled his faculties.

Calphurnia detected the change in the muttering lips, the halt in his speech and step. "Well, Doctor Barradas?" she said.

"You know my name, Madam? How——! Has Chillon——?"

His head dropped; he had beaten his brain for an answer.

"Madam, you have guessed the truth; but for the sake of my comrade do not press me further."

"You have suffered, Doctor? Tell me!"

His lips moved; he breathed deeply. "Madam, I have suffered."

"They flogged you, Doctor? Tell me how often they flogged you." She leaned backwards until he could only see the white mane and two gleaming points of steel.

"I was flogged for insubordination—twenty, thirty, fifty lashes—I forget. . . . It does not matter."

"Why were you transported, Doctor?"

"Because they found me guilty of trying to sell my country to a hostile power."

"And did you?" He could not see the grin on her face.

"No, Madam!"

"And yet you have suffered Toulon and Nouméa —you, an innocent man!"

"Yes, Madam."

Calphurnia sat up and laughed. Jean straightened himself with the jerk of a lashed steer.

"Before God, Madam, I cannot laugh with you!"

She was shaking with laughter; her claw-like hands rested on her narrow hips; the *honk, honk* in her throat told how well Calphurnia could drink her fill of mirth.

She moved slightly, and at a touch the pall rose suddenly from Imaun's sepulchre. A dozen electric globes flashed upon Jean; he blinked, held his eyes for a moment, and then beheld the woman as she was.

Her elbow rested on Imaun's coffin-ship; slowly, almost painfully, she raised her monocle and regarded him with an unbroken smile.

"Accept my apologies, Doctor Barradas; I did not intend to laugh, my laughter is always too loud."

"You will permit me to retire, Madam."

"Not yet, Doctor, not yet. I am lonely, and you must amuse me. You are my guest. Have you nothing to tell me in return for my hospitality? Surely your passage across the Pacific was full of incidents, or was it one unbroken calm? Were you without water and food? I have read of castaways eating each other: did you not think of that once during your voyage, Doctor? Come, come, be frank!"

Jean retreated, horrified, sickened.

"Permit me to retire, Madam! My history would not amuse you; believe me, it would not!"

"Ah, Doctor, you do not understand how your sufferings interest me!" She smote her shrivelled breasts with a clenched fist. "I feel them here, and here!" She rapped her temple with her crooked finger. "I can hear the lash singing through the air; I can see your flesh peeling from the red-lipped wounds. Ha! your white skin must have dripped as if the flagellator had soused it with a pint of claret! You do not know how truly I can feel, Doctor! I can picture you leaning from your little boat—drifting, drifting, between moon and sun. Ah, those nights were full of hunger and silence; a white bird dozing in the air above you, waiting until your form should stiffen, waiting until you should cease to drive it away. How well I can picture that one bird, Doctor! its white beak aching for the red blood under your eyes. Nero never viewed such agony; it was supreme!"

Jean recoiled still further. Her words blinded reason, murdered decency. He watched her dully, uncertain of himself, and almost hypnotised by the fury and truth of her description.

Her voice reached him again; and now it was full of life, musical as spilling water.

"Some compensation must attend your misery? You have not suffered in vain?"

"I have not suffered in vain!" He repeated it slowly.

"You are almost free, Doctor!"

"Almost free!"

"Within an ace!" she lisped. "Why don't you

beg of me to help you? This yacht is mine. These lascars have been mine for years, they would die like cattle to serve me."

Jean covered his face. He tried to speak, to frame words that might reach her heart; and his soul revolted. There was more hope for the man who prayed for his neck under the wheel of Juggernaut.

"Ask me to help you!" She stroked the air with skinny fingers like a pantheress dabbing at her prey.

"Lift your head, Barradas! You flinch as if I had struck you!"

She stamped her foot. "Beg of me to help you, do you hear? Beg! beg! beg!" Her sunken eyes turned to yolks of flame; a sudden fury rent her quaking limbs. "Hold up your head, Man of Sorrow, and look at this!"

She snatched the pall entirely from Imaun's sepulchre, and shook it above her head. But Jean felt calmer now. She was mad, he felt sure of it; and he had taken seriously the ravings of her opium-shattered mind. Pity surged in his breast, pity for sweet, uncomplaining Aimée.

And then curiosity sent him forward a pace to where the coffin-ship was glowing from keel to truck with tiny lights. Deep down under the glass deck lay the gold casket wrapped in Nile rushes, and gleaming like a band of sunlight. Imaun Pasha, medalled and jewelled, seemed to smile up at him from his bed. There was no mistaking that tawny profile, the broad Greek forehead, the finely curved chin and mouth.

Jean stiffened against the rail. He fancied that the very bloodstains remained on the Pasha's tunic, recalling the bullet that had sped from his pistol.

Slowly, very slowly, a tiny spark of thought fired his brain. He leaped back as if the trumpet of the Resurrection had sounded over the world. Calphurnia's dumb-show was as effective as Hamlet's. Then . . . this gibbering hag was Imaun's avenger—the invisible fury that had tracked him, pursued him; *this*, then, was the relentless sleuth who had placed forged plans in his desk and banished him to Nouméa!

Jean stepped to the door and locked it. His laugh was like the maddened drunkard's who has captured an imp of torture.

Calphurnia quailed; the loose skin hung over her mumbling jaws. She had gone too far with her enemy; the skill and prudence with which she had for years concealed her identity had forsaken her in a moment of exultation. The Fury stood revealed, chattering, whimpering behind Imaun's sepulchre.

"Ah, Madam . . . you . . . at last!" Jean towered above her like a giant Nemesis; his stiff limbs grew suddenly lithe, his toil-hardened muscles looped and banded under his coat.

Calphurnia spat at him like a cat. "Touch me not, dog! I have not done with you yet. Do you think I am afraid? *I! I!*" She spat again. "I am not afraid of the Almighty. And you——!" She faced him with basilisk eyes and thrust forefinger. "You shall hunger on the seas again, you shall rot and starve! This is but the beginning. I

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"Imaun Pasha seemed to smile up at him"

will have you stripped, painted, and chained to a leper!"

She turned her red eyes upon him, then cried out suddenly with a hand to her head, and sprawled to her knees, clutching at the tapestry.

Jean laughed hilariously. "Woman, I have been ten years at your mercy, and now I am at the end of all—as you are!"

He poised himself above her, his feet apart, his heavy hands clenched at his side. But he checked his first impulse to catch her heels and batter the wolfish head against the mirrors. The fever in his brain had tenfold increased his power of thought. Yes; that was only a savage's impulse. The man who had been exiled, branded as a traitor, who had been flogged and driven, and had famished on the seas, suddenly developed preternatural cunning, and ploughed his brain for a hint on the science of killing slowly. He remembered that he was a physician, and felt his chin, observing his patient.

She was very frail; opium had impoverished her store of vitality; a sudden shake, a twist of the neck, would put out what little spark remained. Now, if she had been a full-blooded Hebe, alert and pulsing with life, he might have sat up all night choking her by degrees. But since . . .

Calphurnia grovelled forward, her fingers dragged the air as if she were striking invisible harp-strings.

"Aimée! Aimée!"

She croaked out the words and toppled face downwards on the carpet.

CHAPTER IX

GOES OVERBOARD WITH A VENGEANCE

Jean remained immovable, the name of Aimée ringing in his ears. He repeated it several times as if it sweetened his mouth, as if each syllable dripped nectar. He spelt it softly, conjured up the girl as she was, thought of all she must be to the white-haired, slavering devil at his feet.

Then he frowned and put aside his thought, and unlocked the state-room door.

Calphurnia moaned: he looked at her once and shuddered; the pulsing vein in her forehead was painful to contemplate. He closed the door softly and passed upstairs.

A lighthouse flared from the brow of a distant cape. Not a sound broke from the cabins below. He could hear the creak of Byers's boots as he paced aft. The yacht moved through the water swiftly on an even keel; white-lipped seas kissed and mumbled along the hull. He leaned upon the bulwark and breathed slowly and deeply of the pure air.

"Aimée! Aimée!"

Again he tasted the name, again he asked himself what this sweet-faced girl must be to his enemy below, and the devilish thought which had come to him reverberated through his brain until his teeth

clenched tight so that the horror might not escape in words.

And then, as if to complete the damnable picture he had drawn, Aimée approached from the shadow of the deck-house. She stood near the rail with her back to the sea, her white column of throat shaded by masses of hair that broke from under the Tam-o'-Shanter cap.

"I was wondering whether mamma was scolding or sympathising with you, Doctor. I might have stayed and helped you instead of eavesdropping near Monsieur Antoine's door."

"Eavesdropping?" queried Jean.

The darkness hid her blush. "His flute called me. I stole down like a mouse. I think Monsieur Antoine very shy; he will only play when he is alone."

"I do not care for his music," said Jean slowly.

Aimée's eyes were on him in an instant; a sigh of regret came from her parted lips.

"I am sorry you do not love music, Doctor; and Monsieur Antoine brings out all the melody of which his instrument is capable: I could listen to him for hours. I am sorry you do not care for his playing."

She spoke with so much genuine regret that Jean felt reproved.

Her lissom body curved and swayed with the slight motion of the yacht, and straight upon her words came the movement of another melody. Chillon was in fine form, and Byers, execrating him on the bridge, marvelled that such a greasy little man could utter such an air.

"Your sight is improving, I trust?" said Jean, without looking at her. The sob of the pistons filled the moment's silence; a sudden gust sent a shower of spray against the yacht's quarter.

Aimée locked her thumbs behind her and pouted. "I was waiting for you, Doctor Jean. Since yesterday you have never asked me once. Now listen!" She approached, frowning severely. "I can see a hundred stars through that bit of rigging. Am I so very blind?" She pointed a slender forefinger along the eastern horizon. "Quite black, isn't it?"

"Quite black!" echoed Jean.

"Well," she tilted forward on her toes. "It will be lit up presently. Will you make a wager that I shall not see her first?"

"See whom first, Mademoiselle?"

"Madam White," laughed Aimée. "She will climb out of her window presently: I used to wonder why she never dripped when she came out of the sea."

"I shall be in bed before the moon rises," said Jean. "I am glad that your sight is improving."

He motioned her to a deck-light and looked into her eyes until he felt the sweet breath beating his fiery cheek. Some girls would have shrunk from the stern swarthy-faced man, but Aimée looked up at him smilingly, and when a sudden sea sent the yacht stooping in its trough she held his shoulder without fear. She would have held herself from Chillon's touch or Byers's, but Doctor Jean was too much like Paul, and who could be afraid of a man who was like Paul?

"You will demand a large fee for curing me, because you think I have a lot of pennies." She laughed softly.

The yacht shook itself angrily and tossed her beak to the frowning sky. The wind was rising. Jean steadied himself against a transom. Aimée did not remove her hand.

"It is very hard," he muttered under his breath. Then his twinge took him—the twinge of pain from André's kick, his lifelong companion, and he remembered, remembered all. "I will give you a lotion before I retire, Miss Royal," he said aloud: "or shall I send it to you later on?"

"I'll come with you now, Doctor." She followed him below.

Half an hour later Jean approached Chillon's quarters. The tremulous piping of the flute still came from the small cabin; but Jean did not stop to admire what Chillon flattered himself was a masterly rendering of Saint-Saëns' "Tarantelle." The door flew back from Jean's fist.

Chillon was sitting in his bunk with a sheet of Aimée's music open before him. "Stop!" said Jean hoarsely. "Come with me!"

"What are you after, my dear Barradas? I cannot move from this sweet piece. *Hein!* it is supreme! Listen, *mon* Jean!" Chillon moistened his lips and cocked his flute.

Jean shook him by the shoulder savagely. "Come, you fool! come at once!"

Chillon looked up anxiously, saw Jean's face, and put away his flute without demur. Jean's eyes cautioned him against the luxury of a retort cynical.

He scrambled from the bunk with becoming celerity and put on his cap.

"We must leave this accursed ship at once!" said Jean hurriedly. "We have been trapped! Do you hear, Antoine?—trapped! This woman has tracked us from Nouméa. It was she who mocked us on the sea. If we go to Brisbane we shall be arrested on the wharf. We are within half a mile of land. Let us take a couple of life-buoys and drop overboard. It is our only chance. If you will not come I must leave you."

Chillon opened his mouth and gasped; but Jean's manner left no room for objection. He buttoned his coat with the air of a musician who is determined to keep his flute to the last.

"*Cré nom!* I will not go back to Nouvelle! Let us chance the water. Ugh! how I hate it! Chillon can kick himself ashore with a life-buoy. Is it not so, *hein?*"

Jean sprang up the stairs without a sound.

"Take care!" said Chillon breathlessly.

Byers was still on the bridge above; there was no one at the stern. They slunk aft, keeping in the shadows. Byers's keen eye saw them; but he made no sign.

"We must take off our boots and clothes," said Jean; "it is a long swim."

Chillon made a face of disgust, but did as he was bid. With string from Jean's pocket they made two hasty bundles, and moved to a space where buoys were hung. A slash of the knife severed the cords that held them. They watched until Byers turned to seaward in his pacing.

"There is the land! This side! Quick, for your life!" whispered Jean.

The next moment Mahmud the Singer spoke without taking his eyes from the compass. "Didst thou not hear a splash, Sahib?"

Byers cast a look astern, and another at the land, a low sandy coast. Then he smiled grimly.

"It doesn't matter, Mahmud! If a man goes over he goes over to better himself." And in his beard the red-faced sailor muttered, "It's the best way; saves all trouble. We can spare a couple of buoys; and I'd never have forgiven myself for not handing that fat little beast to the police. *He* won't drown; no such luck! I'm a bit sorry for the big cove, though! But it's the best way; avoids all shoals."

Then, to the steersman, "Starboard your helm, Mahmud! starboard! There's the light-ship!"

PART V

THE REVENGE OF THE CHILDREN

CHAPTER I

NARRATES FISHERMAN'S LUCK

"Ouf!"

Chillon shook the salt water from his ears and stamped his feet in the sand. A clouded moon was high in the east. It was nearly ten o'clock.

"But that was a devil of a swim, Jean! It is a good thing for the sharks that they did not get me. *Hein!* the cold is biting my marrow. I could drink a basin of soup, now, or a glass of rum. *Hélas!* there is no such thing as a little village here! And I have lost my boots. I must have forgotten to put them in my bundle. Have you your boots, Jean?"

"Yes; but you can have them," answered Jean. "I will get others." He strode from the surf towards a dimly-seen belt of scrub that lined a hummock on their right. The breakers had piled wall upon wall of soft sand as far as the eye could reach; it half buried them in a noiseless garment as they attempted to ascend. Jean fell back gasping from the treacherous slopes.

"This will not do, Antoine; let us try further down."

Chillon struggled from the tumbling drifts, shaking adhesive lumps from his drenched bundle of clothes. A wide channel opened on their left, belted

with mangroves and glistening with rotting slime-covered water.

The yacht had swung for the opening; her lights burned clearly. It seemed as if their escape had been unobserved; no sound reached them above the clamour of the surf. Byers's bulk was silhouetted against the sky as he paced the bridge; an order trumpeted from his deep lungs reached them across the windy bay.

"Listen! what is that?" Chillon stood on tip-toe, with his hairless chin thrust out. Nothing but the loud rasping frogs broke the silence. "*Mon Dieu!* did one ever hear such croaking! I thought they were ducks."

The two naked figures climbed up the scrub-lined embankment to the sand humps that overlooked the interior. The dim light showed nothing, save here and there a dark mangrove clump, or a rotting pool black on the fainter darkness of the sand. The yacht passed out of sight.

"It is of no use walking," said Jean; "we may be walking into a desert. We must wait till morning, till we can see where we are going. In any case it is useless to hurry. The yacht will be in Brisbane before us, and the police will be warned of our arrival."

He shook out his bundle of clothes, wrung them free of salt water, and put them on. Then he set himself to walk steadily on a patch of firmer sand.

Chillon shivered, and imitated him. "To have to freeze here all night, poor Chillon! Your boots are far too large, Jean!"

"Better here than in an Australian gaol, Antoine!"

"*Sacré!* I have read that the Australian government employs black men to hunt escapees. We have no chance!"

Jean was silent.

"And yet," continued the versatile Chillon, "she may smoke herself into forgetfulness. Then we have a chance—one, two, a hundred. We can separate, we can cross the sea again and get married. No, no, dear Barradas, I do not think we shall be hanged yet. I knew a man in Toulon who was guillotined on the day he should have been married. 'Eugène,' said M. de Paris, lifting him to the knife, 'I am sorry for you.' 'Hush, my dear executioner,' said Eugène, 'everything happens for the best.'"

Chillon snapped his fingers jubilantly, and would have played a tune on his flute if Jean had not restrained him.

For hours they walked up and down. The night was calm, and not cold; even Chillon complained little. Towards morning he declared that his clothes were quite dry, and, curling himself into a sand-hill, slept soundly.

Jean continued his pacing, but more slowly, wrestling with sombre thoughts. The sweet face of Aimée was always before his mind's eye; he saw it colourless in a spasm of pain, and yet the soft eyes looked up at his, beseeching him, trusting him.

The scattered belts of scrub began to stand out more clearly; the lamp which had winked at them along the bay became invisible. Suddenly the sea

whitened in a far corner of the east. A cold wind smote them.

"Let us be moving, comrade!" Jean shivered. Chillon woke and whistled cheerfully.

"Do you not smell something, Jean?" He sniffed the air critically. "I cannot describe the flavour; but it strikes me here." His fat hand made a sudden curve in the direction of his waistcoat. "Ah, how happy could I be if that smell would thicken!"

"Captain Byers spoke of a meat works here," said Jean. "There must be a village."

Chillon skipped forward sniffing blithely. "Ah, courage, Jean! courage! I shall salute the meat works as we pass. Ah, that smell! it is magnificent, sublime! I have not recovered that belly-pinch the Pacific gave us. *Tiens!* Johnny Bull's beef works give me courage."

A narrow bush track followed the river for miles. Wheel-ruts and trenches scored the face of the country north and south; rotting piers and fenced enclosures showed where Enterprise had started mills, and the scattered machinery and boilers of Failure rusted in pools and waterholes. An atmosphere of abandonment lay over the land; crows took wing from a clump of deserted roofs and filled the morning air with lamentable noises.

Jean strode ahead cautiously, until a soft footfall on the crisp, dead leaves brought them to a halt. Some one was approaching.

"It will be a girl," whispered Chillon. "A girl ripening into womanhood. Girls are always afoot with the sun when the ripening is going on. Eh?"

A barefooted young woman slouched along the track; her skirt was ragged beyond description, her sullen mouth matched her lowering brows. She stumbled over the incline that led to a rickety pier in the river bend. A filthy rag covered a plate of food in her hands.

"*Fichtre!* she does not begin the day gladly, *mon* Jean! She is sunk in stupid thought instead of laughing at the river. Ninon Vautrin and little Louise would be dancing at the sight of the sun, singing under their pails of milk. Pretty Ninon! I have smacked her and stolen her milk three, twenty times. *Sacré bleu!* I hope these Australian women are not all sulky-heads like this one!"

The girl sat at the pier-end and turned her brooding face to where a trail of smoke was lifting across the elbow of scrub. A screaming lighter panted up stream, making the pier with terrific grunts. The girl held up the food mechanically; a cheerful deck-hand with a pipe responded with a hunk of coal that threw the water over the girl's face. Chillon slapped his thigh and laughed hilariously.

They followed the river until the track widened and took them into a clear stretch of country—flat and rippling under a sea of wind-blown cane-tassels.

The clamour of a mill broke on their ears; a locomotive coughed and squibbled before a dozen cane-loaded trucks. They made a rapid detour and came suddenly upon a street where children ran and carts clattered.

"We must face it out," whispered Jean.

"First to eat," grunted Chillon; "I feel as if I had not touched breakfast for years. Let us go in here!"

They tramped boldly into a dingy hotel and waited in the passage. No one came. A two-year-old brat sprawled over the floor, fighting with flies and sucking at a yard of green cane.

A red-eyed kangaroo dog sulked around Chillon's heels, baring its teeth unpleasantly and growling. The convict drew up stiffly, without daring to move his short legs, snapping his fingers and whistling in a soothing strain.

"Ho, my fine killer! would you bite a better animal than yourself? Ouf!"

He shot out his heel with electric brevity under the snarling jowl. The beast retreated, bristling and surprised.

"You must not kick these Englishmen's dogs," said Jean; "you will bring the whole place about our ears."

A bullock-team slouched past the door; the loud pistolling of a whip brought a hairy sun-dried man from the back regions. He nodded familiarly as he stepped into the bar and flattened a dozen flies with a beer-stained towel.

"We want—breakfast," said Jean, in his slow English.

"You can have it any time you like." The publican looked at Chillon severely. "You can have it in ten minutes, sir!"

He came out into the passage, looked at the floor for a moment and raised his voice.

"'Riah!" No one answered. Chillon glanced

across the yard and saw a black-haired girl flying after a cow.

"'Riah!" repeated the publican with deadly emphasis.

The black-haired girl stopped suddenly, flung down a pail on a wood-heap, and sulked towards the bar. The publican folded his arms; his brow darkened.

"'Riah!"

"Well?" She stopped, grabbed the piece of cane from the infant, and pitched it into the road.

"'Riah!" whispered the publican, "take a week's notice!"

"Pooh!" The black-haired girl stalked to the door, glanced up and down the street with curiosity, and said "Pooh!" a trifle louder.

"These gentlemen want breakfast, 'Riah." The publican eyed her dubiously. There was a perceptible tremor in his voice.

'Riah swished past Chillon, looked over the publican's head, and mounted the stairs; something resembling the word "Pooh!" reached them from the dark landing. A sneer writhed about the publican's lips. He dropped his voice.

"Since she's been engaged to Bullocky Jim there's no holding her. Proud as Lucifer now! won't scrub a floor since Jim spoke; won't wash that poor motherless kid of mine. Any luggage, gentlemen?"

"No," said Jean slowly. "We came—river—to fish. Boat wrecked. Swim." He stretched out a bare foot.

The publican whistled. "Lost your boots, eh!

You don't say! You are quite wet. How did it happen? It'll make a crosshead for the paper. Lucky you came to me. I own a store round the corner. We'll go round—you'll want some dry clothes."

He shook Jean's thick coat contemptuously. "'Nuff to kill a man in a climate like this. I'll fit you, sir; there's every description of hosiery, and neckties, and the latest London fashions. Follow me!"

They went into the store: and Jean bought a fresh outfit for himself and Chillon. They changed in the store.

The publican-storekeeper was overjoyed at his early stroke of business; he rubbed his hands and chuckled gleefully. At Jean's request he made up the discarded garments into bundles to take with them.

"There'll be a boat along at dinner-time, sir, if you like to wait; or you can walk across to the railway and get a train in a couple of hours."

Chillon made pathetic signs that breakfast was the first consideration: and the publican led them upstairs into a large well-furnished room. A big tabby cat circled round Jean, purring softly. He stooped and stroked it gently and dropped into a chair. 'Riah entered with a tray of steaming bacon and eggs. Chillon was already seated at table, knife and fork raised expectantly, his left eyelid winking encouragement to Bullocky Jim's dark-haired *fiancée*. She floated past, flicking imaginary specks with her cloth, until she satisfied herself that his hands were even dirtier than Jim's.

"Breakfast's ready, mister!" She dropped her voice as she approached Jean, and wondered why he did not spring up as other men did.

Jean stared about the room with the purring cat between his knees. The yellow rug on the hearth, the sound of the girl's dress, recalled the years of his life before the banishment, when Paul used to stand beside the mantelshelf learning his school tasks. It seemed so very far away, so very far, and in the meantime he had been in the habit of eating his food alone, in a cell where the long spike shadows used to climb down through the bars after the sun had dropped behind the prison wall.

'Riah stood behind his chair, helping him occasionally, and ignoring the versatile Chillon until some microbe of dirt swam near his plate. Then she would dash over, flicking her napkin close to his ear.

Jean paid the bill with Scaffles's gold. The publican produced a bottle of whisky. "Gents, we'll have a freshener if you don't mind." Jean put up a protesting hand; but Chillon advanced like a man willing to perish in the breach.

"*À votre santé!*"

"I take it you are not English, sir?" said the publican tentatively to Jean. His reply was lost in a terrific noise which came from an adjoining room. Chillon looked round inquiringly. The publican laughed. "Don't be frightened, mister, it's only Joe Lewis!"

Jean translated; and Chillon grinned. "*Parbleu!* he made me jump. I thought——" He put down his glass gingerly.

The strange noise continued in the outer room. The publican grew suddenly confidential. "You see, mister, it's this way: Joe brings out his paper in that room. You've heard of the *Mangrove Courier?* Well, Joe's the editor. He's game at a pinch, and dead against the Chinkies."

The side-door opened softly; a tall bearded man in dungaree pants peeped out, snipping the air with a pair of scissors, while the perspiration streamed under his cotton singlet.

"Morning, Herbert!" He nodded to the publican and stood with his back half turned to the whisky bottle.

"Morning!" The publican threw a cold glance in his direction and continued an animated conversation with Jean.

The editor raised his scissors thoughtfully and snipped. "Would you lend me a cup or a glass, Herbert? I want to get a drink of water."

"I left a cup inside yesterday," said the publican sternly. "Please don't break my cups."

"The cup isn't there now, Herbert." The editor's voice was pleading.

"Isn't it?" The publican turned again to Jean as if to renew the conversation.

"No, it isn't." The editor spoke with sudden passion. "Your kids steal 'em and hide the water-bag, and a man might rot and perish for a drink of water and never once be asked if he had a mouth."

The publican turned towards him slowly and sternly. "You—finish—your—work—Joe." Jo-

seph writhed and scissored three columns of editorial matter from the air.

"Keep—your—kids—out—of—my—room! I pay my rent, and I want to be left alone. Why can't a man be left alone?" He banged the door viciously; strange sounds came from the passage, as if a giant were beating things very small.

The publican sighed. Chillon, watching attentively, indicated the whisky bottle in a non-committal way. The publican nodded. "That's it, mister. Good stuff for me or you, but very bad for Joe Lewis. To-morrow's publishing day. He's doing an article that'll squash the present government. If I let him touch a drop of that whisky he'd write nothing but Latin quotations."

Jean went to the door; the publican followed apologetically. "Joe's game, though, and dead against the Chinkies."

At that moment an undersized Chinaman shuffled into the store. The publican followed him and vaulted over the counter, turning to his customer with a beaming face.

"Good day, John! plenty rain last week, John? What can I do for you, John? Tobacco, cigarettes, slippers, no? Eh? ha! a pack of cards. Thanks. How's the wife, John? she was looking poorly yesterday. So, so, John; here's a cake for the youngster. It seems only yesterday since I was at the christening. Good day, John."

The Chinaman squirmed and departed with his pack of cards. The publican came back along the verandah. "That's Ah Goon! he's different to the

rest; a quiet sort of cove, spends a bob or two with me now and again. Goon's all right; but I'd take the rest of 'em out in a dredge and sink 'em off Humpybong."

Jean and Chillon took up their bundles. "Know the way to the train? Right! Good morning, gents! . . . Say!"

He called after them gesticulating. "Would you mind stopping for a moment? I quite forgot to tell Joe to get the particulars of your capsize."

Jean, half comprehending, waved his hand by way of negative; and followed Chillon up the street.

CHAPTER II

BRINGS THE STORY TO PAUSE IN THE CITY OF BRISBANE

The Frenchmen strode along the main street of the small township, and the policeman standing near the bank wished them good morning. Chillon brightened under the salutation, and would have tried to start a polite conversation if Jean had not checked him. The publican watched them regretfully from the verandah, thinking of the lost crosshead; and pointed out Chillon's broad back and bandy legs to Casey the blacksmith, with the remark that there went the hardest fit he had ever pressed into a tweed suit.

"Let us keep walking," whispered Jean. "If the woman has laid information nothing can save us. We might go up to the city by boat, but the landing places swarm with police-officers. The railway is dangerous too."

Chillon's breakfast had dissipated all his fears. "Bah! there is no danger. The woman will forget you. The opium-devils will drive you from her brain. Tra, la, la! What a very fine day it is! How good it feels to be out of gaol!"

Here and there the ragged bush showed them vistas of maize-tassels. The road took a sudden turn northward, through sand-humps and rotting creeks, in one of which they sunk their bundles of

clothes with a heavy log atop. They crossed a wooded ridge that ran parallel with the river; and the sun radiated on a pebble-strewn valley beneath. Surly belled cattle stole over the grassy slopes.

By midday they were far from the river, and Jean stimulated his flagging companion with reminders of Calphurnia and the police. The face of the country changed; rusty brown dwellings of wood and iron showed through the dingy greens and yellows of the bush. Carts and horsemen passed them, stopping sometimes to stare at Chillon's round perspiring face and at the grim-visaged Jean beside him.

Once they were accosted by a communicative traveller with a swag who asked the time of day, begged a few matches, and reached out in a spirit of true Australian mateship for Chillon's tobacco plug. Thereupon he fell into step and cheerfully inquired their business.

Jean halted immediately. "Friend, which road —do you go?"

The traveller brought his swag to the ground and wiped his face. "Goin'? I'm goin' to Brisbane. Ain't I toffy enough to be seen with yer? Lord strike me pink!" He hoisted his swag contemptuously and scowled at Chillon as he swung ahead with terrific strides. The word "Frenchies" came over his shoulder, following an impolite adjective.

"The people we have met are very nasty, dear Barradas! I wonder that he did not challenge us to fight with fists. Ouf!"

A droning of voices came through the hot after-

noon air. Beyond a clump of gum-trees they saw a tiny red-brick school-house. Jean dropped into the long grass under a Moreton Bay fig, and listened to the young voices quiring an old song.

> "Glide along, bonny boat, my bonny boat,
> And we'll chant to the sea's melodious note."

"What are they singing, Jean?"

Jean translated.

Chillon wriggled and held his sides. "Bon-ny bot! *quelle sottise!* Hold me, or I shall scream! Oh, my children, you should not make Chillon laugh so. *Bon navire! sacré!* I will never look at another boat while I live."

Jean smiled grimly at the thought of their voyage from Nouméa, and bade his companion be silent.

The murmuring voices sounded inexpressibly sweet to him. He lay back and closed his eyes. The silence between the lessons was profound. He could hear the grass being torn in the dun heifer's mouth under the bank. Over his head the yellow sun-points were spinning golden webs through the dark green foliage. The droning voices numbed him like an opiate. If he could only lie here and sleep out the rest of his life! If he could only forget Calphurnia! If——

A boy was reading in the schoolroom, and each line pierced him through and through. It sounded like Paul's boyish recitation. Then a woman's voice beat its lesson above the mutter of the classes. Chillon dozed until a bell disturbed him and sent a score of whooping youngsters into the road. Jean watched them as they trooped past—lithe, brown-

limbed children swinging bats and stumps, too intent on cricket to observe the wistful-eyed man under the tree.

Later, a small dainty figure came across the ground gloved and hatted as if she were out for a stroll upon city pavements instead of a two-mile walk down a lonely bush-track. A star-eyed atom of six trudged beside her, whimpering softly and casting furtive glances at five little girls who were scampering in freedom around.

"You are a careless girl, Eleanor!" said the mistress, eyeing her severely.

Jean looked up and caught her eye. She nodded pleasantly and gripped her skirts before crossing the flooded trench that fronted the school-house. Jean raised his hat slightly and gazed at the weeping child beside her. The schoolmistress smiled apologetically and then frowned.

"She gives me a great deal of trouble, sir. She is very hard to manage. At first I thought she would be a clever pupil, and to-day I find she cannot spell a little word like *policy*. For shame, Eleanor!"

Chillon's quick eye caught her meaning. He knelt in the grass before the whimpering child, wagging his head and flipping his fat hands as if they were fins. "*Peste!* what do you mean by being naughty, eh? I have a bear that eats children who are naughty. Come to me, my little roley-poley!"

He spoke in a deep, rumbling bass, leering horribly. The child leaped behind Jean, dumb and quaking with terror at the strange man, the foreign tongue.

"Hush, you must not frighten little children!" said Jean sternly; "you must not!"

He took the child in his arms, and held her for a moment. The schoolmistress smiled, nodded good-bye, and was off with her little troop at her skirts. The naughty Eleanor, casting a daring glance back, saw that the men were walking on towards Brisbane.

It was dusk when they came to the city, and the day had changed as they walked; the sky was heavy with clouds. By the time they reached the main streets the rain was pouring.

An ashen light seemed to waver over the steaming houses. Grey sheets of water roared from street to street, over iron verandahs and iron roofs. It was a sound strange to the men who had known thirst in the solitudes of the Pacific.

Jean entered Brisbane as a cat enters a strange house. The lamps at each corner alarmed him; each moment he expected the dark lanes to give up an armed force that would fling him to the ground. Chillon shambled ahead, whistling bits of Schubert.

The rain muttered on the river; the southern express went screaming through the wet darkness on its way to the mountains.

"How much money have we, Jean?" Chillon slouched under a verandah and shook the spilling rain from his hat.

"We have at least one thousand francs," said Jean absently.

Chillon whistled a bar and moistened his lips. "We must sleep somewhere, my Jean. Let us go

to one of the big hotels. There is a fine smell of beer and rum inside. Ah, I shall lie awake to-night smelling beer and rum."

Jean frowned. "Hotels are dangerous; the police come and go; and the landlord may talk. A private house will suit us. I will speak to this man."

He stepped to the kerb and hailed a passing hansom. The driver pulled up.

"Do you know—*une pension*—a board-house—out of—city?" He placed his hand against the window.

Jehu scratched his head. "Know 'eaps of places in the city, boss."

"Out of city," insisted Jean. "Think!"

Chillon stood near the kerb whistling to a small audience of newsboys. His mellifluous notes soothed their hardened breasts; his lipping was masterly. The newsboys breathed gratefully and forebore comments on his bandy legs.

Never had such whistling been heard on the kerbs of Brisbane.

The cabby brightened and gesticulated suddenly to Jean. "Jump in, boss! There's a friend of mine, a widder that lives at Toowong. She'll fix yous. Quid a week and washin' chucked in."

At Jean's motion Chillon tumbled inside the cab, and the newsboys filed off regretfully.

The cabman flogged his undersized and jaded horse along the narrow road that follows the river to Toowong. They pulled up before a broken fence that seemed to conceal half an acre of scrub. Jehu slipped from his box, passed through a gate, and discovered a small verandahed cottage amid a

clump of coral and pepper trees. A young woman came to the door and peeped at the winking lamps in the road.

The cabman thrust out his red hand. "It's me, Susie! How are yer? I've got a couple of gents that want digs."

Jean stepped forward. "We are—travellers—Madame. Wish lodging."

The young woman looked hesitatingly at them. "It's all right, Susie," said the cabman confidentially. "They ain't got no luggage, and look a bit down on their luck, but you should just hear the fat cove whistle! My word! And you so fond of music!"

Susie appeared relieved, but suggested with professional instinct that it was usual for strangers to pay in advance. Jean comprehended, and tendered two of Shaffles's sovereigns.

Then the young woman smiled munificently and shook hands with the cabman.

"Yes, I can let you have a nice front room; Mr. Bunnyman, of the Federal Bank, had it last. Mr. Bunnyman was with us seven years. You know that, Harry, don't you?"

"Know it?" The cabman frowned. "I've seen him a-sittin' at that winder looking at the river as if he had something on his mind; it wasn't the river maybe, maybe it wasn't the bank; Lord knows what Bunny had on his mind, but I'll bet a caser it wasn't the river." He took his fare and drove off.

Susie led the Frenchmen along the passage, and pointed out the surpassing loveliness of a moder-

ately-sized chamber. Jean expressed content; and the woman smiled at him. "This is Lady Royal's property, and every one knows they build good houses. You have heard of the Royals, perhaps?"

Jean swung round slowly and looked at his companion. The young woman nodded secretively and lowered her voice. "We consider ourselves lucky to be her tenants; and if she is a bit of an opium-smoker, that's nothing to do with the people who live in her houses."

Jean turned to the window. "Her house!" he muttered; "her roof! her garden!" . . . But then, it seemed as if she owned the world!"

The woman darted out to trim a lamp. Chillon shivered in his wet clothes and threw himself into a chair. Jean stared at the ragged outline of dripping coral trees. Was there no roof but hers to cover his head? no earth but hers that he could rest upon? A savage smile broke across his dry lips. "When I die, they will bury me on a piece of ground that she has bequeathed to the Government. God has permitted her to become very rich. I wonder if He will allow her to hound me through eternity?"

His nerves jarred at a sudden noise. Chillon had flung his boot across the room, and was contemplating the soft bed with mixed feelings.

The landlady returned with her lamp and set it on the chest of drawers. She paused in the doorway to say that breakfast would be ready at eight o'clock sharp, and withdrew.

All the next day they kept indoors, fearing to show themselves in the light lest the police might

pounce upon them. After dark they loafed about the wet streets.

Despite the continuous rain, a Salvation Army band crashed from the depths of a slum. Jean halted and listened to a girl-child who had flung herself into the ring of Chinese and half-drunken sailors, her hands uplifted, pouring out the history of her betrayal, heedless of the leering crowd about her, craving only for "the love of Jesus."

Jean listened attentively and smiled grimly. "She is fifteen," he muttered, "and her young heart is tormented. Christ have pity, indeed!"

Back again to the better-lighted streets where the bridge lamps whitened the darkness above the mist-wrapped river, past a church whence the strains of an organ floated forth to the hurrying shapes on the pavement.

"Let us go in," said Jean.

Chillon threw away his cigarette, grunting approval. The prospect of a little music pleased him. They sat under the gallery near the seventh station of the Cross. Above it was a copy of the Madonna; her wide eyes seemed to be looking down at Jean—his head bent, his face covered with his sun-blackened hands.

Weary faces filled the benches on either side. Behind Jean knelt a haggard, white-lipped woman praying for her dead sons; in front, almost at the Communion rail, sat the querulous aged clamouring for the mercy of God.

"*Ora pro nobis! Sancta Dei Genetrix! Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi!*"

"*Kyrie eleison! Kyrie eleison! Ora pro nobis.*"

The organ moaned above; the priest turned with monstrance uplifted.

Jean's lips moved; he uncovered his face and stared at the moving acolytes on the altar steps. Chillon sat agape, drinking in the sonorous anthem that followed.

An inquisitive crowd had gathered in the porch; a sudden whisper ran down the aisle, heads were tilted up and back. Some one had arrived—the bishop, it might be. Chillon turned a curious eye toward the crowded porch.

Slowly down the carpeted aisle came two women, one fair, one very dark, holding each other's hands. A deep sigh passed through the incense-laden air. Jean had not turned, his knotted hands were raised to the level of his forehead, his lips moved.

Chillon crouched back with a cry. "*Nom de Dieu!* it is Miss Royal!"

Aimée turned her face toward the sound, but her companion led her hurriedly to a seat. A church attendant looked sharply into the faces around him, to discover the impious wretch who had dared to lift his voice above the priest's.

"Let us rush out!" whispered Chillon; "it is our only chance. She will see us, and we shall be trapped here."

"Be still!" muttered Jean. "She cannot see us."

Chillon looked at his friend, and shivered. Not a word passed between them as they plodded back to the boarding-house.

Jean opened the door that led to the garden, and stepped to the verandah. Strange noises filtered up

from the river; the rain-burdened trees flung bullet-like drops into warm pools underneath them.

"You are wondering if she will catch us," croaked Chillon from the bed. "Why did you not twist the hell-cat's neck? *Peste!* you had your chance before we left her little ship."

Jean made no reply as he turned in the doorway.

Chillon grunted, nosing the soft pillow luxuriously, then he lay on his back and heaved a sigh towards the ceiling. He was thinking that the landlady had treated him scurvily in not offering him supper.

"Shut the door, dear Jean! The sound of rain disturbs me; it feels like a great parrot pecking at my brain."

Suddenly Jean slipped from the verandah, his lips bared from his white teeth, and dashed down the garden to the rickety gate under the pepper tree. Chillon rolled from the bed and hobbled to the door, holding the lamp above his head.

"*Cré nom!* What are you doing out there? Ouf!" A gust of wind shattered the lamp globe across the carpet. Jean crashed back from the shrubbery with a dagger-shaped knife slanting behind his back.

There was silence till Chillon relit the lamp. Then he stared at Jean's face. "*Hein!* you are white, you are livid, Jean! One would think you had seen the woman. Go to bed!"

Jean closed the door and locked it. "I saw a head pass under the lamp in the street—a head with a pigtail, a wet face and blazing eyes. Do you remember that dwarf? . . . through the stern

window . . . pitched bread at us?" Jean shook with an uncontrollable spasm of terror, and dropped to the bed.

Chillon watched him anxiously. "Then she must know where we are—that creature of hell?"

Jean nodded. "The game is up!" he said hoarsely.

His eye had caught the gleam of the dagger under the window. He picked it up. It was a beautiful little knife with a razor-blade set in a heavy and curiously-wrought handle.

"See, Antoine!"

Chillon shivered violently. "Put it away! it is murderous. I shall not sleep. Perhaps he is prowling outside now."

"No," said Jean, gloomily regarding the weapon, "he is gone. But this is his message of Hate. She will never rest till we are back in Nouméa—or worse."

"Ah!" Chillon was silent, reflecting. Then he spoke: "You stay here, Jean! I will go out and try and find him. You know I am a famous detective. If he is lurking here, I will throttle him—so!"

He slipped on his boots, and passed stealthily down the garden. Jean waited for him till past midnight; then dropped into a heavy slumber. And still Chillon did not return.

CHAPTER III

DECLARES WHAT FOLLOWS WHEN ONE SEEKS TO SAVE HIS OWN SKIN

It was the second evening after the yacht had reached Brisbane.

Calphurnia lay on a couch recovering from the paralytic stroke that had prostrated her in the presence of Jean Barradas. Aimée had complained of intense pains in her temples, and had dined in her own rooms.

Calphurnia's hands were stiffened at her sides, her half-shut eyes stared at the dragons that seemed to throb and gape at her from the painted screens. Her thoughts would not come into shape; her quick mind was numbed, incredulous of itself. The meeting with Jean had shattered her nerves more effectually than the fumes of a hundred pipes. She told herself again and again that she had been dreaming, that Jean had never set foot on the deck of her yacht. She curled herself almost double; her dry lips were pinned by thirst as if she had drunk a deep draught from the sea. Twice she stretched upwards to clutch the opium-lamp that burned in the niche above her head, but something withheld her and she fell back grey-lipped and mumbling. Until she could comprehend the truth she was resolved not to touch the pipe. Had she dreamed that

Byers came to say that the castaways had jumped overboard? Had she really told Tam to search out their whereabouts? The spheres of her brain seemed disconnected; she could not think consecutively; no sooner did she grasp a thought than it evaded her. With all her will she set herself to think, to bring her rebellious brain into subjection.

If Jean Barradas were at liberty there would be no rest for her, and the pipe must wait. She sat up. Opposite her was a map of Australia. Her eyes traced its coast-line to assure herself that it really was an island, and that no peninsula existed which might connect it with Asia. The opium had softened her brain; and there were moments when the word Australia conveyed no sense, no idea of locality. If it had not been for the map she might have lain back torturing her memory to find out if Brisbane were in Russia or in Egypt.

The empty space round the margin of Australia convinced her that Jean Barradas would have to take ship. There were no trains by which he could transport himself elsewhere. Jean Barradas the Frenchman would not be hard to find in Australia. She could employ a detective service of her own, and at the same time command help from the Australian Governments.

She felt inclined to allow Jean to smell liberty; he could not go far, and a whisper from her would set the law in motion at any time. The wonder of it was that he had not torn her to pieces when she revealed her identity. She giggled hysterically at the thought. Prison life had evidently dulled his mind. It was foolish of him not to have beaten out

her brains. Never again would he have so excellent an opportunity.

A Burmese gong hung at her elbow; she stroked it softly and leaned from her couch. The bristling Tamerlane waddled under the wing of the stork and dropped his enormous head to the leopard-skin rug. She blinked at him, struck his neck feebly with her slipper.

"Tell me again, my Tam, what you told me last night. You found the man?"

The dwarf grunted assent.

"And you showed him the Fear, as I bade you?"

The dwarf's eyes sparkled; he gabbled furiously. Calphurnia followed him laboriously, and several times made him repeat his words. Then her eyes too sparkled; she lay back with a sigh of content.

"Ha! that was good of thee, Tam; he will remember the knife."

The dwarf nuzzled his huge head into the couch and kissed her dress, giving animal caresses for the praise.

"But we must watch him, Tam, lest he escape. We must use the police. Put on your European clothes, my Tam, and drive to the Detective Department. Tell them to let me have Lestrade, and bring him with you. Hurry, my Tam!"

The dwarf vanished to the rear of the house, unlocked the stables, and glared at the rows of glinting harness stupidly. The rain roared on the iron roof above; an Arab filly snorted fearfully at the queer shape squinting over the box.

"Yussuf!" The dwarf shouted the name across

the yard; there was no response. A peacock sailed past him to the shelter of an outhouse.

"Yussuf!" He stole back to the stable and brought out a whip; a tremulous snore came from a near room. Tamerlane had once attempted to harness a pair of thoroughbreds to a carriage, with remarkable results; one of them had bitten his legs while the other jammed him against the iron rails. Tam waddled into the coachman's room with a kindling eye.

"Yussuf!" He struck viciously at something on the bed. "Get up, thou dog, and attend."

The half-dazed coachman nimbly slipped from his stretcher. "Do not strike me, Tamerlane sahib! Did I sleep? W'Allah! it must not happen again. Believe me, sahib, I did but nod. A carriage, did you say, sahib? The thing is done!"

Calphurnia lay back peering through the half-drawn blinds into the chequered darkness of the river. The ivory clock ticked incidentally and was silenced by the *drip, drip,* from a cistern overhead. She began to count the drops and tired, but they fell with such irritating persistency into the zinc spout below that she felt compelled to begin again. The drops increased in volume and weight until they recalled the sound of an eagle's beak pecking against a fleshless bone. She stopped her ears; but the now terrific *drip, drip* would not be shut out; the pecking strokes became clanks that ended in short, trip-hammer smashes on the zinc gutter below. She sat up glaring into the darkness outside; the sharp explosions nearly stunned her, and yet she was aware that they were mere drops of falling water from the

rain-filled tank under the eaves. She walked unsteadily to the door and snatched it open. A wind from the river blew stinging drops of water into her face. She sneezed violently, and the explosions died away to a far-off booming in her ears; then the cold air caught her throat and she sneezed again.

A wide terrace ran round the lonely mansion; statues glistened whitely through the dark pines; some one lit a line of Japanese lanterns down in a sheltered nook of ferns. A canopy of light in the west showed where the city lay.

Calphurnia heard the crunch of carriage-wheels on the drive; and from the end of the slope came the clink of a boot. A big shape slouched past the white statues and approached the terrace. Calphurnia thrust her haggard head into the rain and fumbled with her monocle. The figure shook itself on the steps, stamped its feet, and pitched a fizzing cigar into the pool.

"Are you Lestrade?" she lisped amiably. "It was clever of Tam to send you this way."

The shape shook itself again as if it hated raindrops on its coat. "Yes, Madame, I am Julian Lestrade. It is an honour to be remembered by Lady Royal."

He wiped his wet face and shook himself again. "Shall we stand here, Madame?"

Calphurnia did not reply; her arm rested against the moulding of the door, and Lestrade saw that the sleeve was torn and exposed the shrunken, sinewy limb inside. He approached her by half a pace.

"Stay where you are, Lestrade, and answer me briefly. I will keep you five minutes. Now . . . have you ever heard of Jean Barradas?"

"Never, Madame."

"Listen, then: Jean Barradas is a French convict—a criminal of the worst type—who has escaped with a comrade from Nouméa two months ago. He came to Brisbane in my yacht: my captain found him starving on a beach north of Townsville, and he imposed on my daughter's pity: I was too ill to be told. With the other he is now hiding in a cottage at Toowong—Tam will tell you exactly where. I want that Barradas arrested and returned to Nouméa."

"He shall be, Madame. And the other?"

"The other does not matter: I would rather let him escape, I think. There will be a pleasing contrast for Barradas to think of—ha, ha!" Her shrill laugh rang out.

"I will see, Madame. It may be difficult to take one without the other. From your description it is clear these are the two concerned in the attack on Trooper Donegan."

"Ha! what was that?"

Lestrade briefly told her.

Calphurnia smiled. "Yes, that was Barradas, without a doubt. Well, you have double reason for catching him. Now go, and do it quickly. But wait!"

The detective paused obediently.

"By a strange chance, the man's son is in my service. He will be here to-morrow; my daughter has wired for him."

Lestrade shook his head. "I don't think he will be of any use, Madame."

"No; it is not that." She bruised her pulsing temples with her shut fists. "But I will contrive that he goes to see his father. And, Julian, you know I am worth serving. I want Barradas arrested at that moment—the moment when they come together."

"That will be difficult, Madame!" He recoiled a pace from the indrawn lips, the pecking chin. "We must not take any chances."

The answering gibe on her lips changed to a wheedling note. "Yes, yes, you are right, Julian! Do not take any chances. And yet"—she laughed sneeringly—"you would find your quarry, Julian, if you had to hunt for him amongst the millions of Tophet. Ha, ha! if I had a son I would make him a man-catcher. You may go, Lestrade! When shall I hear news?"

Lestrade consulted a yellow-faced watch frowningly, and looked at the spilling rain under the eaves. "Madame! I shall put a man on watch tonight."

"Two thousand pounds if you catch him in his son's presence!" she lisped. Lestrade swung round slowly; his white teeth were bared in a fierce smile.

"Good night, Lady Royal!"

He stepped into the rain gingerly and put up his umbrella. She watched him as he avoided the pools and freshets, with his waterproof gathered up as if it were a skirt, and chuckled softly. "Puss, puss, puss!" She covered her mouth with her hand, and whispered the words after him.

"Did you call, Madame?" He turned like a big cat and looked back.

"If you catch my tabby near the gate, Julian, tell him to come home! Speak to him; he will understand you. Ha, ha!"

She retreated into her den and dropped back among the scented cushions. The opium-lamp glowed above her; she stretched her hand for the red-stemmed hookah beside it, and clutched it with trembling fingers. The screen moved instantly; Tamerlane's bristling face peeped round, his enormous hand descended over like a fan.

"The pipe is empty," he grunted.

"Empty!" she lisped. "Why is it empty, my wicked Tam-Tam? I have not touched it for three days."

The dwarf remained silent, but inside the hollow of his hand lay the captive pipe. He looked at her regretfully, with a big lump moving up and down his throat.

A pleading tone crept into her sharp voice. She covered her face. "Fill it, my Tam, once more! once more! and let it be the last. The devil is safely snared. I have nothing to do now but wait and stare into the dark. It is horrible!"

The opium-lamp revealed the bluish lips, the white despair in her gaunt face. She snatched the empty pipe from him and gripped the stem between her teeth. The dwarf hung his head; her pleadings always lashed him through and through; somewhere in his brutish mind was a sense that bade him correct her unbridled longings for the drug.

Her voice grew suddenly musical; she caught the ivory lace on his sleeve half playfully.

"Just a little, my Tam! no more than a bee would draw from a poppy. It will be the last. My word is my word. Let me smoke my last smoke so that I may dance my last dance with the kings below. I must bid adieu to Antony and Cæsar, to Marat and to my dear friend Richelieu. Ah, they will miss Calphurnia!"

She stretched out her hands imploringly.

"One little smoke, my keeper of the drug! so that I may dip once more into the blue streams of Acheron."

Tamerlane vanished and reappeared with coffee. She sipped it eagerly and returned to the pipe stem, nibbling it and whimpering querulously.

"Keep awake, my queen!" croaked the dwarf. "They may not catch the Devil." His slug-like eyes squinted down at her, his canorous voice filled the room.

"Keep awake!" He snuffed the opium-lamp venomously and backed out into the corridor.

Strange plashing sounds came from the lawn that stooped towards the river; the rain-burdened trees swished with a shallow sound as of a tide on a level strip of sand.

The pipe-stem cracked under Calphurnia's nervous bites. The darkness was beginning to frighten her; it was nearly midnight. She would have started up and scuttled after the dwarf, but she dared not move lest a hand might suddenly catch her in the dark. The rain drummed on the verandah; a sten-

torian frog barked from his warm pool, and the wet night echoed his note and drowned it in loud plashings.

She was not afraid of the faces that were coming through the misty windows, some of them were pretty, very pretty. . . . If Tamerlane would only permit her to have one thimbleful of opium all these people might be sent about their business. She placed two feverish fingers over her starting eyes to keep the lids shut. A grey face with mocking, insolent eyes looked down at her from the crowd of dusky profiles, and the lips opened like a wound and spat on her cheek. Calphurnia wiped the stain with great humility, although the tiny splash stung her as if it were molten lead. She tried to speak, but the fire in her throat only permitted a wailing sound to issue from her hot mouth. Then other faces commenced to spit in sympathy. Gentle-visaged Hindoos, little Arab boys, stung her with lips of fire, lips that she had taught to sing forbidden songs.

Why did not Tamerlane come back with his brass-handled knout and scourge away the grey-faced woman with the insolent lips and the damp hair? She was like Delisle's wife. Did they say she had flung herself and her babe into the Hoogli? The dusky line smiled and struck her one by one, but still, with the ghostly faces tossing above her, she fumbled for her monocle, grinning sardonically.

"Begone, my children! and put ochre on your jaws. Am I a child to be frightened by such a pantomime? Why do you not dance and fling up your cinder-scarred heels? Ha, ha! no traveller

returns. . . . Herewith I give Hamlet the lie. Believe me, young gentlemen, I regret that I was the Eve of your downfall; but that business was inevitable sooner or later. Dance, dance, and shake the clinkers from your curls. And thou, Mistress Delisle, what dost thou want with Calphurnia? Take away thy hand; I will not follow thee. Where should we go? eh, where?" . . . She leaned over to catch a vagrant whisper. "Begone, Mistress Delisle! that snow-white face of thine was not bleached in Tophet. The gods bound thee and thy babe to a Himalayan crag where Hail smites with his rods. Begone!" She lay back with her white mane tossing over her neck and breasts, sneering and cackling with lunatic mirth.

The *pat, pat* of a hand against the door broke the silence without. Her roused ear caught the sound; she struggled upright. "Who knocks at the gate? Is it thou, Macbeth? Hath the deluge flushed the Styx that thou lookest for shelter? Come in, come in, Macbeth!"

The door-snap clicked; a sudden draught stirred the Delhi drapings of her canopy. Chillon the convict stepped across the rugs to where the querulous voice had hailed him. Her cough guided him; he stooped as the silken folds swept over his face and shoulders, and stood irresolute for a moment, fearing that he might stamp upon her wriggling body. The rattle of her breath located her, his straining eyes perceived a curly slip of white huddled against the velvet background. She addressed him softly.

"Art thou a real man? Have a care, there are devils around thee; swing thy arm and beat them

off. I will give thee a beaker of wine for every blow thou strikest. Sit down, Macbeth! thou art welcome!"

The convict spoke swiftly in French, answering her gesture.

"*Merci!* Madame. My name is Chillon. I am the comrade of Jean Barradas."

"Barradas, ha! The comrade of Barradas? And what dost thou here?"

"Madame, I have come to tell you news. I was waiting in the rain, and I saw you talking to a man. When he went, I ventured to knock."

"News! what news? Have they caught him already?" Calphurnia sat up, alive and interested.

"No, Madame! But I will tell you where to catch him."

"So!" She cackled mirthfully. "You have come to betray him. I am glad. He will love to know of that."

"Madame," said Chillon with a deprecating wriggle, "I do not wish to go back to Nouméa; and you have no quarrel with me. You are all-powerful here. Let me go, and I will tell you where to find him."

"His comrade!" Calphurnia doubled herself in a spasm of laughter. She put a jewelled fist on his knee. "And thou art his comrade! I cannot see thee, but I know thy hands are dirty."

Chillon grunted; the tips of his fingers hid his mouth. He saw in a flash that she had forgotten him completely. Her opium-sated mind had not retained a hint of their brief acquaintance of ten years ago. The starry glow of the opium-lamp

failed to penetrate the darkness of the wide, octagon-shaped room. "Yes, Madame. It was I who shared his pleasure-trip from Nouméa to Australia. You cannot have forgotten me, Madame? You cannot have forgotten the little boat that lay under the stern of your very fine ship? You threw me a biscuit, Madame!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" She twisted, holding her sides at the thought. Well she knew that his fists were clenched before his hairless face, his chin sunk on his breast. "I remember. Ha, ha! ho, ho! you snapped it up like a famished dingo. I saw. Ho, ho!"

Chillon did not wince under her jeering laughter, his lips were crushed, his half-shut lids flickered uncertainly. "*Cré Dieu!* you take a jest in a proper spirit, Madame!"

"Monsieur Chillon, thou art not so tall as Macbeth, and yet thou remindest me of a dear little pig I have seen in hell. I think I will let thee go, for the sake of that dear little pig, and for the sake of Barradas."

Chillon breathed more freely. The desire of revenge was beginning to overmaster his fear. He rose, glanced swiftly up and down the passage, and returned. A savage pucker lined his brow. He sat deliberately at the foot of her couch. Her slipper touched his hand.

"Madame," he began, "what made you play with a lion like Barradas? *Hein!* I think you have been very indiscreet."

Calphurnia's laugh made him shiver again. "I think thou hadst better be gone. I have no quarrel

with thee. Go! Yet stay awhile." She sat up suddenly. "Thou hast seen him suffer. Tell me! have I not wrung the music from his lips? Thou art his comrade: surely thou canst tell me that. I will give thee money."

"Madame, Jean never complained. I have watched him labouring in the quarries when he might have loafed like me. *Peste!* Jean was a fool. I knew him in France—he was not frolicsome then—I knew him in prison, and he was just the same. Your revenge was not big enough, Madame!"

Calphurnia writhed.

"You lie! I see it in your face. Jean Barradas has suffered; it is written in his blood on the stones around Nouméa. He has hungered and thirsted on the Pacific. He could hardly answer me because his lips were stitched with thirst. Ha, ha!" She wriggled and kicked Chillon in her merriment.

Chillon smote his thigh as if he relished her Satanic humour. "Madame, you are a princess of schemers! *Hein!* it would be a poor world if we did not get our jokes from different heads. But you have not heard Jean's latest, princess!"

Chillon rose again, and listened, then rubbed his hands softly and bent over her.

"Barradas is a slow thinker, Madame; his brain does not fly from thought to thought like your own. But when it pleases the gods to send Jean Barradas an idea he makes the best of it. Do you know, Madame, that your daughter, Miss Aimée, liked Jean? She thought well of him on the yacht. She obeyed him as a little child obeys its mother. You failed to observe that, Madame, because you were

drunk with opium and revenge. *Tiens!* you should keep little feathers from your head when you are tricking a lion. Jean Barradas was once a celebrated physician; there was a day when the world shouted his name. You know that Miss Aimée was troubled with weak eyes. But you do not know that Jean the physician was treating her: he could have cured her. That was magnificent, Madame, was it not? And I clapped Barradas on the shoulder because Miss Aimée is a musician—ah, supreme! Then something happened; you sent for him. I do not know what passed between you—an exchange of civilities, no doubt; but Jean came out of your cabin like a man who has seen his enemy. Miss Aimée met him on deck. I think she gave him a flower. Ah, that was sweet, was it not? And Jean took her below and did a little something to her eyes. He was merciful; he did not kill her; but some day he will kill you. Madame, your daughter is stone blind!"

Chillon sat perfectly still so that her brain might receive the full measure of his statement. At first he thought she had fallen asleep: his hand made a slight movement toward her face, and then her taloned fingers closed on his wrist, dug into his veins like knife-points. He feared he had compromised his own safety. If she had cried out he would have flung himself from the room. But since Chillon had suffered so much, he was singularly curious as to the effect of pain upon others—Calphurnia in particular. The fierce claws on his wrist, the rattle in her throat, told him how hard he had struck her. And in that short moment Chillon could weigh the

revenges of Jean Barradas and of the woman beside him.

The blood trickled down his sleeve, a numbness stole over his hand, he sucked his lips and looked down at her.

"You cannot hurt my wrist, Madame, the iron has been there and hardened it."

"*Click! click! click!*" went the noise in Calphurnia's throat; her body wriggled under him like a cobra in a bag.

Chillon wrenched himself free with a savage laugh and slipped from the room. His iron-shod heel clinked on the terrace floor, he flew down the steps and across the lawn, crouching under the dark bushes to listen. Cry after cry rang through the lonely mansion, a dozen swift shapes passed along the terrace; an inner door slammed.

"*Sapristi!*" he muttered; "Calphurnia has awakened from a very unpleasant dream. She has forgotten me; but Antoine remembers the Pasha's wife who sent him to join her enemy at Ile Nou!"

CHAPTER IV

IS OBVIOUSLY INTERPOLATED BY GOOD ANGELS

Paul received Aimée's telegram at noon. The train for Brisbane passed through the township at five o'clock in the morning. Paul spent the afternoon in arranging station business; and at evening Monty harnessed a pair of strapping bays and drove him to the township. At the half-way house a change of horses awaited them, and they reached the end of their journey before dawn. Paul never forgot that all-night drive.

"Good-bye, Paul! Give my love to the Brisbane girls, and bring us back a keepsake of the sea. Wish I was going with you." Monty rested his arms on the carriage-window; he was sincerely sorry to part from the young Frenchman.

The engine whistled. Paul leaned out and wrung his hand. "I shan't forget you, old boy! Take care of Tonson!"

The driving-wheels bit the rails as the short train swung out of the township, along a ridge, and went hammering down the mountain slope. Wide valleys opened beneath; belled cattle went tinkling into the gullies before the hissing monster until a lower plateau stretched before them from north to south. Paul's heart leaped to the tune of the loco, as ridge and gully swung behind each mile carried him nearer to Aimée.

It was not six months since he had come to Barcroft Downs; but already the charm of novelty had passed, and he was only waiting a little—till it would not appear ungrateful—to ask permission to leave and go in search of his father. The liberal salary allowed him gave ample means for the voyage to New Caledonia; and Paul keenly felt that each day his father passed in prison was a disgrace to the son who might save him.

Save him! How? Paul had no idea. What he had learnt of Nouméa since reaching Australia had filled him with horror. The sullen convict-gangs had been described to him; the stern warders, the harsh discipline. That his good father should be labouring in such a hell! It was frightful! First he would go and ascertain the facts. Then he would plan the escape. He resolved to ask Aimée's permission to leave at once. Poor Monty! Paul had not told him his thought that it might be their last parting.

Paul thought of Aimée; and the queer familiar ache came back to his heart. Resolutely he crushed it down. Aimée, the millionaire's sweet daughter, was not for him, the convict's pauper son. He loved her, true; he thought she liked him. But their spheres lay far apart. Let him for ever remain her grateful, humble servant. Why had she sent for him? Perhaps Calphurnia's influence could aid his father to liberty. If that might be, how gladly would he become her willing slave for life!

So the day passed for the brooding Paul. He dozed or watched idly as the train stopped here

and there to pick up a swagman or a woman with a child. By and by the level plain changed to rich undulating downs and flood-wrapped streams. Deep gorges were crossed where the thunder of falls smote pleasantly on his ear. They were approaching the seaboard: grey bellying rain-clouds reefed up and up from the east, drenching the far peaks with rolling sheets of mist.

It was dark when the train slowed up in the iron-roofed metropolitan station. Paul sprang into a cab; found a hotel; and was soon plunging in a bath. He dined hastily, and half an hour afterwards he was rattling to Lady Royal's house in another dingy hansom. He dismissed the cabman under the red lamp, and walked slowly up the winding path to the lantern-lit terrace. He met no one, and the silence awed him a little. He looked at his watch; it was past nine o'clock. An incandescent lamp cast an overpowering glare through the main hall. The sound of a violin, hardly touched, caught his ear; he walked across the hall to an open door. It would be pleasant to enter unannounced: might he venture, so late? Or should he go back and wait for the morrow?

Aimée was moving across the octagonal drawing-room, her hands wandering along the wainscot, touching corners and feeling her way with much craft. Paul started back stiff and agape: he had seen blind children groping like that in his father's hospital at Paris. And her face was changed, oh, so changed! Broad bands of hair waved across her white temples; her lips were pallid, and the terror in her face set his heart knocking at his ribs. He

touched the door gently, and stepped on the velvet carpet.

Aimée turned almost sharply, and faced him. "Did you get the book, Agnes?"

Her hands rested idly on the table, she made no further movement.

A stuttered answer held Paul's faltering throat. He moistened his lips.

Aimée's face looked straight towards him, but the sparkle in her eyes had gone; the flickering smile about her ashen lips was pathetic, meaningless.

"It is I, Miss Royal," he said gently; "Paul Barradas!"

Aimée's hands flew up to her temple; her breath came sharply. She moved towards him.

"I didn't know," he stammered, "I didn't know that——"

"I am ill, I'm afraid," she said. Her hand was almost apologetic. "My mistake will appear absurd, but to tell the truth I can't see. It's an awful bother, isn't it?" A tiny frown creased her forehead; it was gone in an instant. "I'm glad you have come. I have just come in from church."

Her fingers touched his, and the quick blood splashed in his cheek. He fought to keep back the pitying words that trembled on his lips. "I did not expect to find you so, Miss Royal. But it will be all right, I am sure."

"I have seen the best doctor here, and he won't tell me anything yet. I can't believe that it's a total eclipse."

Her hands wandered to the saffron ribbon about her throat; her voice strengthened. "But never

mind me. How have you been getting on? How is Mr. Tonson?"

Paul stammered something about the overseer's indifferent health, and stood watching her.

She groped to a sideboard and struck a gong. "You have come very quickly," she said. "Perhaps you are tired; you have not dined."

"Pray do not trouble, Miss Royal." Paul stood irresolute, afraid of his own voice.

"I have some important matters to discuss, but I did not expect you this evening."

"I am afraid I have been rather precipitate. I should have waited till to-morrow. May I call upon you in the afternoon?"

"I shall be at home all day. Are you going?"

He nodded, forgetful of her blindness, but she seemed to understand, and groped after him to the western terrace. A man turned the corner of the house and passed them, moving to the entrance-gates.

Aimée followed the sound. "It is somebody who has been to see my mother," she murmured. "She must be much better!"

Paul did not hear her; he was looking at the night. A soft wind from the river whipped the lazy palm-stems; a deep-freighted steamer stole past, heeling a little as the flood-waters caught her by the keel. Aimée found the balustrade and turned her face to the dark hollow beneath.

"This reminds one of the *Murrumbidgee*, doesn't it? One can almost hear the pulsing engines and the music of the band. It seems so long since we left her."

"Yes," he answered hoarsely, and stared across the darkness to the misty lamps at the pier-head.

It seemed for the moment as if the earth had drunk her fill of rain. A sudden rift of stars appeared in the west, but the east was gathering another deluge from the ocean. The night was gloomy, yet for Paul the presence of the woman he loved invested all with unutterable sweetness. The piers below were prattling with the tongues of a full tide. A windless palm-stem wrapped Aimée's face in a scarf of shadow. Her outstretched hand sought the fluted column beside him, and the movement recalled her blindness. Never had he seen her hold her gypsy head so high, or noticed the slumbering curves of her body move with such witchery under the sweeping silk.

Behind this numbing ecstasy lay one savage reproach, a reproach that seemed to fill the world with the echoes of "Nouméa—Nouméa—Nouméa." It boomed in his ears like the thunder of surf. Never must it be forgotten. When love threatened to overwhelm him, let him remember that word and for ever hold his peace. For one short minute her voice assumed the sweet banter that recalled their old sea camaraderie.

"If the worst comes to the worst, Monsieur Barradas, I can earn pennies with the piano. No, with my fiddle. Pity the blind, good people! pity the blind!" She swam forward with hands outstretched. "I'll give them 'Robin Adair' and 'Ben Bolt.' It will be better than sitting at home counting my fingers."

"But . . . you haven't come to that—count-

ing your fingers, I mean, and you wouldn't play your fiddle unless you wanted pennies for the hordes of motherless children you support. Don't I know! And you wouldn't give them 'Ben Bolt.' You'd play that piece you once rendered to me on the *Murrumbidgee*, and every man and woman who has known the despair of the Bush, the pain of its solitudes, would drop his last dime into your little money-box." He strove to be light-hearted, to match her humour. "All the world shall praise you!"

"It never will—never!" She dropped her hands: the tiny mouth gaped.

"It shall! I will compel it to listen. And for my trouble the Czar will steal and hide you in the North. There will be loud vivas in the East and West and South. Oh! what a hurrying across the white steppes to see the Austral Witch! I see the snow-heaps with many sleighs piled up on your threshold! And the palms of all the deserts will bend to hear you. Europe, Asia, America! You will conquer them all!"

An impulse seized him—he stooped to her trembling hand.

"But I don't know whether it's day or night," she faltered. "All is blotted out!"

The flatness of her voice struck him with fear. She thrust out her round, white chin like one who is already acquiring an acute sense of hearing. He steadied himself against the parapet.

"Don't worry, Miss Aimée. I'm sure it's only a temporary thing; something wrong with your nerves. Lots of people have it. I know. My

father was the greatest eye-doctor in Europe. Now you're crying. I know more about it than you think. You must have good advice: I'll make you —I beg your pardon, Aimée, but . . . my father would have aided it, only—Good God!—I didn't think it was so bad, dear!"

And so with "Nouméa" booming in his ears he took her in his arms and kissed her sightless face.

"*Stowaway!—son of Jean Barradas!*" The full tide under the pier seemed to mumble it with many tongues. "Why didn't you leave me in the seventh circle of ashes, Aimée? Who am I that——?"

Her fingers stopped his mouth; her voice faltered between laughter and a sob.

"Because I dared look at you, Paul; I who am only the daughter of Calphurnia." Her fingers searched his face, touching his hair and throat and brow.

"Nouméa—Nouméa—Nouméa!" The lapping tongues mumbled it: but this moment was not to be denied. Like a drunkard he bent to her lips, and she held him as if she were falling, falling into a dark abyss.

A far-strayed curlew filled the hollow air with cries of reproach. Her touch lashed him with supremest ecstasy, because he stood so near to despair.

A deep red stain dulled her throat—the seal of his furious lips. And yet her face remained inexpressibly pure: she was not even amazed. It would be their last kiss,—the vagrant curlew wailed one word to the river, and the flood-wrapped piles answered, "Nouméa! Nouméa!"

He stood from her, almost sullenly. She had shown no resentment when he held her in his arms; perhaps she wondered a little, thought him queer. He retreated from her craftily and without noise. The shadow of his father swam before him—with bleeding hands reddening the pebbles under a grey sea-wall. And the word "Traitor" seemed to ring across the Pacific as it had rung through Paris when the mob hooted Jean from the steps to the Palais de Justice. Aimée must never know.

She was smiling. How red her lips had become! How ruffled the scented, shadowy hair! He felt mean, shallow, gross, penitent.

"Where are you?" She whispered it almost plaintively. "Paul!—Paul!—Paul!" A look of fear stole into her face. She thought he had gone, and her hands flew from the column to the parapet, from the parapet to his breast.

She gasped a little and hung her head.

So . . . it was not because a wave of self-pity had swept over her that she had allowed him to hold and kiss her; it was no girlish impulse. She wanted him—wanted him: the white searching hands had groped for a touch of his body. The thought was like a whip! His ideas flashed swiftly across the mental vista. Surely it was not too late to undo the moment's madness. He could easily lose himself in the Bush. It was a simple matter to change one's name in Australia. Besides, her blindness was only temporary, a specialist would cure it with a bottle of lotion. At the year's end his image would pass from her memory. She must never know that he was the son of the notorious Barradas.

"I must return to Barcroft Downs to-morrow." His voice was flat, dissonant.

"Why, Paul?" She was holding his sleeve.

"Tonson needs watching."

"It doesn't matter, dear!" She laughed softly. "He can't spend all my pennies in a day or a week."

"I must go back. I must work out my salvation. I will send in my report to-morrow."

"I can't read it: what's the good?" Her lips were wrenched apart.

"I beg your pardon; I almost forgot." He retreated half a pace.

His sudden reserve, his deliberation, put a quick fear into her heart. He had kissed her in a moment of pity, and by a feminine process of reasoning she leaped to the conclusion that he had gravitated back into his normal state—good-natured tolerance, boundless commiseration for her unfortunate malady. She had never deemed it possible that Paul would return her love. And she wanted him: her lonely heart cried out for his very touch. All the yellow dross from her mother's argosies could not buy him or his love; mere quantities of metal had no attraction for him, and she had nothing more to offer. The little power she possessed—her touch on the piano, her knack of rendering absurd emotions from her violin—was almost lost to her. Music, outside her own poor themes, was blackened out for ever. She held the parapet to save herself from falling. They stood a long time in silence.

The pent-up fierceness broke from the east. The iron roof above them rang under the great slopes

of rain, and the river snarled and whitened under the lamp-lit piers.

The impotence of the rain lashed Paul into a sudden unaccountable fury. If it were God's business to wash the earth, why did He not cleanse it of New Caledonia, of the black conspirators who drowned the very pebbles with the blood of innocent men?

And, "You cannot go out in this rain!" she said piteously.

He was on the steps, and the torrents drenched him through and through. He was compelled to shout his answer—incoherent words that conveyed no meaning. She quailed. Then moved by a despairing impulse, he slipped back and kissed her brow. He felt it would be the last time.

Her mouth trembled a little. She heard his footsteps clink and die away on the lower terrace. Suddenly the dulled sound of a scream came from Calphurnia's rooms—then the sound of another and another. Aimée started and ran inside.

Paul counted the steps mechanically as he descended to the grounds. "Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, so!" He seemed to have lost the power of thought, yet his eyes saw vividly. The faint sound of screams still reached him from the house. He paused and wondered if he should return, but silence followed. He moved on.

A wet, white pebble glowed under a near lamp: a marble Diana smiled above the uplifted globe in her hands: Paul looked, and the shadows turned the goddess's frank smile into a vulpine leer.

A short fat man was squatting under the lee of

the statue. The rain dripped over his hairless face; he blinked at Paul feebly.

"Plenty of rain for the little ducks, Monsieur."

"Plenty," said Paul dully, answering without noticing that he was addressed in French. The other noticed, and wondered who this stranger was. If a compatriot, he might be of use.

"You have come from the house, Monsieur? Did you see Lady Royal?"

"No!" Paul moved away slightly. The little man's frog-like attitude repelled him.

Chillon watched him craftily. He was beginning to shiver for his own skin again. The warmth of revenge had left him before he reached Calphurnia's gate, and he was wondering whether he had gone a little too far with her.

Paul moved to go away: Chillon ran forward with a whine. "Pardon, Monsieur! Monsieur is a friend of the family?"

"Why do you ask?" said Paul, stopping to look at him attentively.

The rain dripped off Chillon's hat and fell plashing on his shoulders: he forgot it; for the fear of Ile Nou was in his brain once more.

"Because," murmured Chillon hesitatingly, "I would like Monsieur to be so good as to assure Lady Royal that it was not my fault; that I came to tell her as a friend. Truly, Monsieur, it was not my fault. If Monsieur would say that, I would be eternally his humble servant."

Something in the man's manner alarmed Paul. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Monsieur, it is that I was unfortunate. With

my comrade I came from the north in Lady Royal's fine ship. There was Mademoiselle on board—a musician—ah!"

"Yes; what of her?"

"Monsieur, it is very sad; she is blind. My comrade has a grudge against her mother; he did something to her eyes; he made her blind for ever. It was not my fault, I swear!" added Chillon rapidly, watching the change in Paul.

Blind! Paul felt his universe reeling around him. Blind! for ever! That angel! And she loved him. And some fiend had blinded *her*—it was too monstrous.

Chillon gabbled on—protests and pleas which Paul hardly heard. He was dazed with contemplation of such a crime, such a victim. Then a new thought darted across his brain like lightning. The criminal! where was he?

"This man, this comrade—is he with you?" he asked.

"Monsieur, he is at a house up the river." Chillon gave voluble directions.

"And this story is true?"

"On my honour!" replied the little Frenchman, with a hand to his heart.

Paul turned; he had thought of Aimée—lonely, perhaps in pain, ignorant of the extent of the affliction which had ruined her life. A wave of pity and love submerged him. He retraced his steps to the house.

"And Monsieur will speak for me?" quavered Chillon after him.

Paul made no reply; his eyes were fixed on a

gleam of light from a window in the upper story. It might be Aimée's room.

He would not venture to knock, though many sounds came from the closed house. But all night long he waited, pacing up and down in the pitiless rain, with his glance fixed upward. And all night long the little gleam of light spoke of a watcher within, of sickness maybe—maybe of a desolate girl with a mad mother, left almost alone—and blind.

Paul thrilled with love as he gazed. And as he walked, walked, walked till dawn, he hardened with the thought of vengeance. It was a man ten years older who returned swiftly to the city in the early morning, with a fierce determination at his heart.

CHAPTER V

PAUL MEETS HIS FATHER

Jean Barradas stood on the cottage verandah and looked anxiously towards the city. Chillon had not returned all night: where could he be?

The rain was over; and the last sullen clouds were scurrying off before a fresh westerly breeze. Jean debated with himself what to do. He had spent a sleepless night: the constant dread was ruining even his nerves of steel. His eyes were unsteady, and his sun-tanned cheeks had grown haggard. He prowled across the verandah like one who could find no rest; his stiff hands clenched at his side, his body alert and bent as if he feared a sudden blow. The mistress of the house watched him through the blinds: she suspected she knew not what.

Two men came up the road; Jean spied at them in the distance. They wore no uniform; but there was something in their square build, their measured gait, which seemed ominous to his eye, familiar with the police of Nouméa. He walked back into the sitting-room, and through the window watched them come up to the house, pause, cross over the road, and stand talking. Behind them a younger, lither figure was hastening up.

Jean went to his bedroom, took the trooper's

revolver from its hiding-place within his shirt, and tested the mechanism to see that it worked without hitch. Then he paused, irresolute. It might be a false alarm. Still——

He went softly to the back door, and the head of a man who was peering over the fence disappeared suddenly. Jean's heart beat faster. Then it was danger! And where was Chillon? He looked out into the garden; and saw no one. He half resolved to make a dash by that side, and trust to luck. But poor Chillon! He could not speak English; he could do nothing in this foreign country. If he came back to the house, and found his comrade gone! No; that must never be. Chillon must never have reason to deem himself deserted, after all they had suffered together.

The gate clanged; Jean heard a quick step come up the path to the door; he set his teeth and waited, with a hand in his shirt. There was only one, he reflected; bah! no need of the pistol.

He heard a knock.

The landlady answered.

"Is your lodger in?"

"Which one, sir? The old gentleman is in."

"Right; I will go to him. Where is he?"

Jean wondered; surely he knew that voice; surely——

There was a knock at his bedroom door.

"Who is there?" asked Jean.

"Open the door!" Something in the tone thrilled Jean indefinably; he was stirred by a sudden rush of old memories.

The voice spoke again, in French. "Open the

door, do you hear? or I will burst it in." The lock rattled as the door was shaken vigorously.

Jean Barradas slipped across the hearthrug, his body bent, his eyes kindling. There could be no mistake; only one voice in the world spoke like that. His heart leaped: he stepped forward and turned the key.

On the instant the door was flung open, and Paul stepped within.

He had not changed his sodden clothes; his eyes were bloodshot, his hands clenched.

For a moment the men stared at each other.

"Father!"

"Paul! my little Paul!"

Paul's arms opened; he flung himself forward; Jean held him close and kissed him.

"My Paul! my little Paul! my little son! Thou here! Thou sent by heaven in my despair! Blessed be God who has united us!"

Paul gave way and sobbed freely: there were tears in Jean's eyes.

"Oh, my father! my father!" He said it over and over again. Jean touched his face, stroked his hair wonderingly. This was indeed his son—so grown! such a man! a son to be proud of. Gently he loosed Paul's embrace.

"Calm thyself, and tell me all. We will never part again. How didst thou find me?"

The words sent Paul shuddering with recollection. He looked up, still holding his father's hand.

"I do not know. I came——" He checked himself. "Where is the other?"

"What other?" asked Jean, eyeing him fondly.

"There is only I; I and my comrade Chillon—a convict, truly; but so good withal."

"Then how comes it——?" Paul paused in perplexity; then continued. "Surely he is here; I have not mistaken the place; I took good care."

"Who is here, my son?"

"The wretch I was seeking when Heaven sent me to thee, father. He who has been guilty of the most abominable crime."

A sudden dizziness took Jean; he sat down. What was this?

Paul ran to the window and threw it open, then came back apprehensively.

Jean motioned him away. "This crime; what was it?"

"Father, I met a woman who helped me when I was in utter misery. She gave me back my manhood, my self-respect, when I had sunk almost to the level of the swine. She was very wealthy, yet she smiled on me, a pauper. She is as good as the angels, as beautiful as the dawn. And last night I learned that a villain had blinded her, that he might be revenged on her mother, Lady Royal."

"Lady Royal!"

Jean's fingers grasped his knees. Through his mind there flashed a picture of a boat drifting idly across an empty waste of ocean. The red west was receiving the sun; a white-billed sea-fowl drowsed in the windless vault above, beating its pinions with a louder noise than Chillon's heart. The boom flapped, the boat staggered in the dark. The sea lay as still as salt, no reef or island marked its silence-haunted leagues. A black ship swept down

the glittering levels; the moon whitened her shrouds, corpse-like faces glowered at him over her sides. No sound from those hundred lips, no sound save the crash of spray under her keel. She rode past voiceless as the dead. The pealing notes of an organ filled the hollow of the ghostly ship; a moaning anthem stole across the ocean to fill his heart with tears. The half-set moon lit up her awning-covered deck; the boat rocked in the backwash. Jean saw himself leaning against the tiny mast with a threatening fist raised as the black ship sprung away into the west. . . .

He opened his eyes, and found Paul kneeling beside him, gently caressing his hand.

"Are you ill, father? Shall I go for help?"

Jean turned his gaze full upon Paul; all the strength seemed gone out of him; his eyes were weak with entreaty, soft with love.

"Hush, Paul! I must think a little," he said gently. "Thou speakest of Aimée the daughter of the woman Calphurnia."

He paused, a frown darkening his features. "Antoine Chillon has been talking. Where didst thou meet him?"

"In the grounds of Calphurnia's house. He spoke like one in anger, father. It seems impossible that he could have invented such a story."

"Antoine has done wrong, Paul. Yet there is a grain of truth in his talk. God knows the thought came upon me once to cast into outer darkness the daughter of the woman who had wronged me!"

"Father!"

"Listen, my Paul, and judge afterwards. I was

banished to Nouméa by that woman, that devil Calphurnia, whom they call Lady Royal. My life was ruined, all to satisfy her revenge, because I had slain the man who—who killed your mother. I lost you, Paul. My body was flayed; I rotted for three years in the nickel mines. Then I was lured on to the sea in an open boat to hunger and thirst under her eyes. Perhaps Chillon told you; and yet he could only tell you a little; my life's agony is only known to myself and God. I could have killed this woman; that was easy; but I planned to rend her as she rent me. I had lost my wife and my son; only through her daughter could I touch her. I thought not of the girl; only of her mother and—myself. Yet, Paul, when you judge me, remember how I have suffered."

He did not venture to look up.

Paul understood at last. His brain reeled at the spectacle of this tremendous conflict, born so long ago, continued so bitterly, issuing so terribly. From that duel, then, in the Bois de Boulogne, itself caused by some crime of Imaun Pasha towards Paul's mother, had sprung this growth of ruin. The original offence of Imaun Pasha was only now consummated. And the revenge of the strange woman who loved Imaun had destroyed his father's life. The sins of the fathers were visited on the children.

Paul's anger had fled; he felt very humble. It seemed to him that he was strangely small in the presence of these tragic figures, flung hither and thither in the strife of their passions like the playthings of some vast shape of Destiny. How weak

were human creatures, how futile their thoughts and acts, when all these plottings and contrivings led to such an issue!

Paul looked at his father with purged eyes. How changed he was! The strong figure that used to toss him in joyous arms was bent double. The hands were torn and lacerated with brutal toil; a life's agony was engraved in every furrow of the scarred visage. And he so good! so loving! All the past rose up to plead for him.

"Father, forgive me!"

Paul knelt again, and kissed his father's hands, his clothes. Jean raised his son in his arms and placed his lips to Paul's brow.

"My little son! Dost thou remember the old path by Clerien's mill, where we walked so often in the morning, thou and I? Thou wouldst run from me to pluck flowers; and when thou tiredst thou wouldst come back to my breast and nestle there—like this!"

For a moment he strained Paul close.

"And thou askest me to forgive thee! Nay; it is thou who must forgive me! Forgive me if thou canst, my Paul; for indeed I was sorely tempted. And we will go away and live together in some place where the world will never find us. I will again be thy dear father; thou wilt again be my little Paul. It may be that we shall be happy yet."

Paul drew away, and rose, standing with down-bent head. Jean rose too, and looked at him pleadingly.

"Can we not bury the past, Paul? This girl, thy benefactress; I will heal her if they permit me."

Paul raised his head.

"Father, I love her!"

"Thou lovest her!"

Jean's eyes lit up strangely.

"Paul . . . listen!" he cried, in a voice grown harsh with pain. "I know what is in thy mind. . . . I will go to Aimée."

"Father!"

"I will go to Aimée," he continued with an effort. "I cannot tell whether she is beyond hope. On her mother's yacht I examined her once. I saw that her case called for special treatment. I could do nothing for her then . . . on that evil boat. Yet . . . Paul, a thought came to me . . . from hell, a thought that was near to my damnation."

Paul cried out, covered his face from sight of his father's ashen lips. "No, no!" And again he shrank from the livid menace of the lips.

Jean straightened as one who heard a murder cry. His face became transfigured. "The thought, only the thought!" His hand fell on his son's sleeve. "To place her in outer darkness."

"To blind her!" gasped Paul.

Jean's face blanched a little, and for a moment speech hung dead between them. "Only the thought," he went on at last. "Yet, now when I think of Aimée's love and gentleness the thought almost equals the deed. Something spoke within me, Paul . . . your mother's voice whispered and stayed my hand. The idea of revenge which had become my religion took shape when I looked into Aimée's eyes . . . that evening on board

her mother's yacht. The thought leaped at me. Never did an injured man hold the keys of light and darkness as I held them, the power to blight and destroy for ever the daughter of his enemy."

Jean ceased speaking. A look of ineffable compassion came into his face. Then a sigh escaped him that sounded like a half-uttered prayer of thanksgiving.

Paul understood, and his boyish rage and indignation turned upon Antoine Chillon, whose tongue had spread the fiendish story.

"Do not blame him, Paul. The poor fellow has suffered at Calphurnia's hands. Let us forgive him his drunken lie." Jean's eyes had grown moist; he put up his hand for a moment. "There is a chance of arrest if I go to Calphurnia's house. Yet it is better that I should go," he went on slowly, "for I must see Miss Royal alone."

"She will come here!" cried Paul, almost beside himself with an insupportable joy. "I will go for her now." He started for the door; Jean held up his hand.

"Listen, Paul. Aimée's case will take months, a year maybe, before definite results are obtained. Even now I am not certain that it is not too late. I must have time and leisure to operate if necessary."

Jean trembled as one who feels the glorious instincts of his profession surging within. One thought held Paul now—the ensuring of his father's personal safety and freedom from arrest. It seemed better that he should go alone to Calphur-

nia's house and prevail upon Aimée to see his father.

"Go, tell her," said Jean, after Paul had explained his reasons for going, "that it is better for her to come to me at once. Even now she may be crossing the borderland of darkness from whence there is no return."

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH LOVE CLINGS TO A VERY EVIL WOMAN

Calphurnia had heard Lestrade's news with strange calm; one would have thought Jean Barradas nothing to her. Only her fingers plucked at the silk coverlet as her head turned towards the coffin-ship where dead Imaun lay waxen and stately, indifferent to all the turmoil of human passions.

"It is finished; my prince." Calphurnia whispered the words and closed her eyes. It seemed to her that the end must be near. Her hysterical rage at Chillon's disclosure had climaxed in a catalepsy which lasted six hours—hours during which the wasted form lay as rigid as if in death itself, and only the faintest breathing showed that animation remained.

. . . . .

Following her mother's often-repeated order, Aimée had not sent for doctors; and hour after hour the blind girl knelt by the bedside of the unconscious woman, mingling tears with vague prayers, and murmuring again and again "Paul! O Paul!" It seemed to her that the mere sound of his name brought solace in her trouble.

Once she dozed, to dream that Paul's voice broke upon her ears full of his old, glad, laughing comradeship; the tones changed, and she heard the

despair that rang through his last good-bye. Then she woke and sat up, her white face thrust out, her hands groping with the uncertainty of the new-blind—groping for his touch, his consolation.

With the dawn Calphurnia recovered consciousness. Her mind was almost clear, but her limbs were cold and numb; it seemed to her that life remained only in her eyes and brain. She remembered that she was wounded. Her enemy had risen against her, and had struck his blow with the quiet stealth of a god. Yes, she was hurt—too hurt to cry aloud, too hurt to sob. Chillon's words would not pass away, they had stamped themselves upon her limbs, they stayed in her mind to wound and wound again.

"She gave him a flower; ah, that was sweet, was it not, Madame? And then Jean took her elbow and did a little something to her eyes. . . . Madame, your daughter is stone blind!" Calphurnia heard, yet she could not shed a tear, not one. In that moment of waking her life unrolled itself to form one gigantic picture of sin and hate. She felt that a single tear would blot the picture out; and she could not shed the tear. She bent her will to the struggle; her jaws clenched in the desperate endeavour; she half rose, and concentrated all her power. One tear! In vain; she sank back gasping and discomfited. The effort had exhausted her; she passed again into semi-consciousness; and on the horizon of dreams she saw Jean Barradas smiling. His figure came close and whispered, whispered malevolently. . . . Calphurnia heard and shuddered. "Madame, there is no hope for you—

no hope! Your last tear fell long ago into the Pit, and Satan caught it in the dry hollow of his tongue." She woke with a cry, to see Aimée bending above her.

With the aid of restoratives Calphurnia regained a little strength, and always her eyes quested over her daughter's face.

"Dearest," she whispered, "come closer; I am hurt. Hold me . . . so. Your Fate has black wings, and each wing touches a planet. It was the last night on our yacht. . . . I felt them sweep over us. I thought thou wert asleep until I heard thee cry out, 'Mother!' It was when the Wings moved over us. I heard the cry; I should have heard had I been beyond the farthest star. But I was bound fast in chains of dreams, and I could not cross to thee. Ah, where was pale Christ, Christ who loveth children? . . . And . . . I am hurt. Dearest, your arms . . . closer! . . . In a little while. . . . Death, my dark cavalier; my very good friend . . . anon, anon!"

Aimée wiped the withered face tenderly. "Hush, mother, I am very well. Rest, and you will get better quickly."

Calphurnia fondled her head gently, passing her fingers over the eyes that appeared still clear and seeing. Her brow contracted; despite herself her body shook convulsively. In what terrible region of thought wandered the mind of that strange woman who saw the plottings of ten revengeful years brought to this harvest of sorrow!

The dwarf announced Lestrade. Calphurnia ordered him up and listened, it seemed, without exul-

tation. What profited, indeed, the death of the man she called her enemy, when above his grave would still live his cruel handiwork, the ruin of her daughter's life?

. . . . . .

The day passed dismally in the white mansion by the river-side. Calphurnia dozed and wakened and dozed again. Late in the afternoon she sat up and spoke a welcome to Delisle.

The captain of the *Imaun* advanced with a faltering explanation that he had come for orders, and had left the yacht in the bay. In his eyes, in his whole figure, shone undying devotion. He had drunk of Calphurnia's magic philtre, and the potion would never cease to animate his veins while the life-current circulated.

Calphurnia regarded him queerly, yet tenderly, and bade him welcome.

"Ah, thou lovest me, Delisle! And this my daughter loves me well. And thou too, my Tam! Indeed, I have been a very evil woman; yet many of the good women have never been loved as I. And that because always I gave more love than I received, even when love was greatest. Is it not so, Delisle?"

Aimée wept.

"A very evil woman I have been," repeated Calphurnia, drawing her daughter closer; "yet I have lived my life; surely of all things that is best. And when I thought to die in triumph as I lived; lo, I am brought to naught by this woe upon my daughter!"

Her eyes pierced the carved and inlaid ceiling

as if beyond it she sought an overruling Power that had thwarted her at the last. Nobody answered her; and she took her word again and spoke.

"And now I feel that Death is in my blood, even the Death who took my Prince, the Death who may this day take my Enemy."

Aimée's sobs defied restraint; they broke and shook her violently. Calphurnia soothed her with quaint baby-talk in a language which only the dwarf understood; his huge head nodded like a pendulum, punctuating the speech of his mistress.

"Listen, Aimée, my beloved one, the child of my beloved one! Dost thou love this young man, this Paul?"

Aimée hid her head beside her mother's; her hand stroked the grey wisps of hair back from the high forehead.

"And he loves thee? I guessed it; even I did not oppose it. Do I know why? One would say I had some foresight of the Destiny which has caught us in his net. Surely we are ground very small in the mills of the gods. . . . And thou lovest him! Never will he be worthy of the daughter of Imaun; men are no longer such as I knew them! But thou wast never like thy mother, my darling, to love the fierce and kingly. . . . Ah! I have seen—what I have seen. . . . My head whirls; give me to drink."

The dwarf presented some strange elixir of his own, pouring it from a gold-encrusted flagon into a chased glass, where it seethed and shimmered like the essence of life itself.

Calphurnia sipped and laughed shrilly.

"Ho, ho! my Tam! thou knowest indeed the secrets of the sages of old. I to die! Never while one drop remains in thy flagon. Never while thou canst transmute for me one drop of thy thick blood. For this is bought with thy blood, is it not?"

She listened to the dwarf gabbling furiously, and turned again to her daughter.

"Blind! my poor Aimée; blind—thou! And I hope not. He could do that work too well. Then, if thou lovest him, take this Paul; let him cherish thee as I can cherish thee no longer. For I am now to leave thee, I who sported with Fate to find myself Fate's sport, to know my own breast pierced by the dagger of my vengeance. We are puppets all. Look well at me, my daughter, child of my best lover, my most beloved, kiss me well and hold me closest; for thou wilt see me no more until thou meetest me beyond the mountains."

The last words were hardly heard; Calphurnia's eyes had closed: the stimulant's reaction had come. She passed into broken sleep. The watchers waited, unstirring, till she should wake.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST JOURNEY OF CALPHURNIA

"W'ALLAH! this road would lame a hillman, serang!"

"Ai, ai, Mahmud! but lift thy feet a little more and hold thy tongue. The sahib's road is good enough for jungle cattle. Pick up thy feet!"

Twenty-four lascars crashed through a narrow bush track that dipped into a valley where cane-stalks and slime rotted in black flood-channels. The track wound up and up to the crest of a mangrove-skirted hill. Sometimes the sharp noise of a whip broke the stillness, and the hurrying band would turn fearfully to see if Tamerlane were at their heels or dogging them from the ragged belts of scrub.

The two dozen lascars were divided into three companies. Ten bore a black conical mass between two poles; eight more carried a tall litter enclosed in jade-green hangings; the last six were burdened with food and cooking utensils. In their rear skulked Tamerlane, experimenting with his lash on the insignificant calves of the unhappy twenty-four.

It was the third night of the journey; and the lascars were weary of Calphurnia's whim to lengthen in this fashion her farewell to the land.

A low half-moon was the bearers' only solace through the darkness. Strange banded creepers

hung motionless across the path, like serpents about to strike the moving turbans beneath. A hundred pools glimmered where streams had flushed under the rotting mangroves.

Suddenly, somebody spoke three sing-song words; with one unanimous grunt the sweating band put down their burdens and stood in groups about the grizzled serang.

Tamerlane stamped forward, bristling with rage. "Up, dogs! to the sea! Up, up!"

His canorous voice drowned the muttered protests from the twenty-four; his green-hide lash cut here and there among the nimble calves.

The serang interposed. "Tamerlane sahib! my children are weary. The Pasha's coffin-ship is heavier than lead. Whither we are going I know not. My children are unused to the land. They are sailor-men all. Do not strike, sahib!"

He stepped back to the quaking group and flung out his speech in the vernacular. The dwarf leaned against the trunk of a fallen tree, watching savagely.

Imaun's sepulchre rested in the open space; behind it was the tall litter with the jade-green hangings, scarcely perceptible against the dingy background of scrub and mangrove.

The serang swung his arms aloft, and cursed his followers in Arabic and Bengalee.

"Up, children of the Pit! and hurry this coffin-ship to the sea. It is the will of the queen. Wages shall be tenfold. Can ye not rest afterwards in the beloved hills of Cashmere? There will be a scatter-

ing of gold to-night. Tamerlane hath said it, and the word of Tamerlane Sahib is the queen's word. Which son of perdition dare ask the queen's business? Up, Hassan! up, Yussuf! up, Murad! ye can build huts near mother Gunga and rest all your lives. Come hither, Ayoub and Ali Buksh, and lift the Pasha's ship. B'ism-ar-Rasul! ye shall go back to Calcutta like nawabs. Tamerlane Sahib has bar gold in his iron box; I have seen it with mine eyes."

A wire rattan sang about his ears; a smitten Hindoo howled in the stillness. Ali Buksh cast himself before the serang.

"Hold, serang! Have we not brought her ship from the four ends of the earth? This work is not the work of a sailor-man; this carrying of the dead on our shoulders. Whither does she lead us? Not to the burial-ground!" He turned to the attentive group around him and threw back his head. "No, my brothers! she leads us to the sea again; and for what reason I know not."

"Peace!" muttered the serang, cuddling his rattan reflectively. "The journey is nearly over, and the queen will pay us well."

"Queen!" sneered Mahmud the Singer. "I have seen her ride upon a camel into Benares. She was without clothes. The priests hid her in the temple of Hanuman. W'Allah! she has no shame!"

The serang spat meditatively into the dust.

"Thou art the liar of Bengal, Mahmud, but as thou sayest . . . to ride a camel thus into Benares——"

"It is true, serang; I was then a news-writer.

On my oath it is true. These things were laughed at by the soldier sahibs. At Umballa she stole a Maharajah's son and taught him all the vices of the Pit."

The serang licked his betel-flecked lips and squinted absently. "Ai, ai, Mahmud! thy stories are like the pages of a wicked book."

Tamerlane cracked his whip viciously. The serang spread out his hands.

"I hear, sahib; but thou knowest this is the hour when all good Mohammedans kneel in prayer."

His forehead brushed the sword-grass piously; the twenty-four were on their knees beside him. He addressed them softly in the vernacular.

"This pig of China goads us as if we were cattle, and we be clean children of the sea."

"He is an eater of offal," prayed Karim Buksh, "and the woman Calphurnia found him in a sewer. He has not yet been washed. Truly she is a lover of unclean beasts."

"Take care!" whispered Murad, lifting up his face towards heaven. "He hath a quick ear for Hindi. He knoweth many languages. Yet, he hath the bowels of a jackal."

The serang prayed steadily with his face in the grass. "Didst hear of the Doctor Sahib that came with us from the North?"

A sudden peal of laughter made him look up. The green curtains around the litter were rent asunder. Calphurnia clambered down the steps blinking, chattering like an awakened mummy. White wisps of hair clung to her lean neck and shoulders; her dress was torn to ribbons.

Tamerlane eyed her sorrowfully; he had filled many opium-pipes before they started.

"Where is Jean Barradas?" she chuckled. "Where is that Devil?"

A frown stole across the dwarf's apish forehead. To him she had been as a living deity, fearing naught and impervious as the iron gods in the pagoda at Yuen Gobi. She was the incarnation of his dead ancestors—the relentless, deep-hating princess of the desert. And now, the gods had smitten her. He leaned across his tree-trunk, watching her aimless movements.

"Where is Jean Barradas?" She picked the crumbs from the grass and put them into her mouth. "To-morrow Imaun will rise and draw his sword. He will keep away the devils from Aimée's eyes."

She struggled to her feet and limped towards the Pasha's sepulchre. The crouching lascars raised their heads, watching her stealthily.

"Where is my true love? Imaun! Imaun! 'tis I who call thee—thy own Calphurnia!"

She dragged the pall from its fastenings and peeped through the glass deck into the hollow beneath.

"Where is Aimée, my Imaun? Why have they shut up thy daughter in the black dark?"

Tamerlane approached her softly, his brass-handled whip behind his back.

"Let us go on, my queen! It is not good that these dogs should look upon the master's face. Let us go to the sea as thou didst order."

"Ha, we shall go to the sea!" She glanced at

him vacantly and broke into a lunatic laugh. He adjusted the pall reverently, while she hobbled round him in a circle.

"Where is my beloved, my Imaun? Where is the light of my little Aimée's eyes? Will the sea give it back?"

A spur of the hill echoed her every word with startling plainness. "Give it back!—give it back!"

Tamerlane sprang forward, striking out savagely at the wriggling, gaping lascars. "To the sea! ye dogs! The queen has dreamed of a light. Up, dogs! up!"

Calphurnia hurried back to her litter, and the procession moved forward protestingly. The crack of the dwarf's whip resounded through the dark gullies. The half-moon hung watch over them in the south-west. On and along went the sweating band until over a last ridge they saw the far-extending ocean, the vast Pacific.

"W'Allah! we cannot go beyond that!" growled Nana Lal.

"Down! down we go, my children!" purred the serang, "until the wet sand clogs your feet. What the queen will do then I know not. Hurry, my children! hurry!" He smote a halting Muslim gently with his rattan.

The half-light illumined the south-west; broken cloud shadows swam across the white edge of surf. Moist slopes of sand stretched north and south, scarce yielding under the trooping feet that halted beyond the barrier of wind-piled weed.

Calphurnia descended from her litter, clapping

her hands in infantile delight. The rising wind, coming a point or two off the land, made her shiver; but her eyes burned with furious fever. She danced on the beach as she had danced at Delhi long years agone; snapping her fingers like castanets, and nodding her head in time to the weird music that beat somewhere in her brain. It seemed that her ebbing life made visible the dregs of her mind, as the jetsam seaweed was left upon the beach by the ebbing tide. She was a spectacle to shudder at.

Mahmud the Singer dropped a low word in contempt of women to his comrades, yet not so low but Calphurnia heard it.

"Give them money, my Tam, and let them begone!"

Her eyes blazed suddenly, her lean arm indicated the tall figure in the centre of the gang.

"Hark to Mahmud! Mahmud the Singer! He knows me; he has served me; and now he would mock me, the dog! Let him pray to Allah, let him pray to Hanuman with the humped shoulders because once I stole his apes. What have I not done? Have I not jeered the young priests of Ind, stolen sweet-faced boys from their temples? Mahmud knows by what name the women of Asia call me! Ha, ha! I have broken many castes. I have emptied the bowels of fish over the head of Buddha. I have spat into Brahma's dark mouth. Mahmud knows. And thou, Murad, thou hast seen me with the yellow Manchurians. Ha, ha! those hot nights in the scented pagodas! Dost thou remember, my Tamerlane?"

She squatted in the wet sand and grinned with a toothless mouth. The dwarf sighed.

"Dost thou remember the night when I tried to steal the little emperor from his women folk? It was at Peking, and I was under the palace walls with my guards. The little emperor used to walk hand-in-hand with his slant-eyed mother—a cat without a sun or moon of her own. I tempted him from the palace walls. . . . Ha, ha! another week and I should have trapped him aboard my ship, but for that cursed British admiral. What news it would have been for the nations! Cæsar's triumph would have been as nothing to Calphurnia's. He made the world weep. Almost she made it laugh!"

She spread herself in the sands, wriggling with mirth.

The sharp keel of Imaun's coffin-ship rested in the surf. Tamerlane tossed the pall aside, watching her curiously. Then he took a tiny lamp, lit it, and screwed the handle to the masthead.

"What art thou doing, my Tam? Ha, ha! I see." She wiped back the damp, white hair that clung to her temples, and scrambled forward to the coffin-ship.

"Imaun! where is Aimée? She cannot live without light. We must get two lamps for pretty Aimée."

She turned towards the gaping band and dropped her voice.

"Jean Barradas stole her eyes, my children, and sold them to a jeweller in Bombay. We must get them back!"

She stretched out her arms to the sea, and nodded, and nodded.

Two stars hung low on the horizon, blazing through the mist like embers in smoke. Calphurnia's gesture was imperial.

"And that dog of a jeweller set them beyond my reach! See how they beckon me! I should know them among all the stars of heaven. Have I not kissed them a million times when my little one has been asleep? They are so low in the sky that I can reach them from my boat, and Imaun will be there to keep guard!"

Tamerlane hung his head: a suppressed laugh went through the lascar ranks; every shoulder shook save Mahmud the Singer's.

Calphurnia turned to the dwarf with a sudden sneer. "How canst thou live without me? The children of the city will mob thee when I am gone. All the world is dead. . . . Imaun and the Devil are buffeting each other across the floor of Tophet . . . I cannot see Aimée suffer in the dark. . . . Ha, ha! How he writhed in the boat!"

The dwarf glanced seaward at the two stars that fired the horizon. Calphurnia touched his shoulder:

"Give these men gold and let them begone."

He stooped to do her bidding. She knelt beside him in the sand and whispered:

"We must not tell them where we are going, lest they warn the jeweller of Bombay. We must steal the lamps to-night. Aimée shall not be kept in the dark. Quick, my Tam, and pay them!"

The dwarf drew his fist from the litter and dropped an iron-bound box on the beach. The

serang regarded it wistfully, and made a sign to the chattering horde in the rear. The dwarf flung his weight against the coffin-ship, pressed it inch by inch across the shallows until it almost swam. Then he caught Calphurnia in his arms and placed her on the glittering deck. She laughed gleefully and clapped her hands.

Tamerlane lowered the tiny sail, and drew the sheet around a cleat.

"Push, dogs of Hind! and finish your work!"

Twenty hands caught the yacht and hauled her beyond the surf-line. The sail filled and swung over the glass deck, driving the sharp keel through the second line of rollers. Tamerlane crouched at the tiller. His bristling face expressed no emotion: he glanced back at the gaping lascars and spat contemptuously over the rail. Calphurnia turned towards the horizon.

Then the serang swung the box of gold to his shoulder and wiped his brow.

"They will never return, my children! The queen is mad, and that pig of a Chinese will perish with her. They have no food; no water. W'Allah! what folly!"

Mahmud the Singer stood wrapped to the waist in surf, staring at the yacht's tiny lamp as it dipped in the hollows of the incoming seas.

"She would not perish if she were tall enough to reach a star; the ocean would not cover her hips. Two stars for the blind Aimée!" he muttered.

The moon vanished like a broken wheel, leaving a sullen wrack of cloud along the east. The quick darkness hid the slouching band of lascars, moving

where ragged bushes rustled their harsh leaves to a wind-broken tune.

They halted on the crest of the ridge and looked back.

The tiny yacht was hidden somewhere between the white-lipped seas.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REVENGE OF JEAN BARRADAS

PAUL found the house of Calphurnia in darkness. A curious silence hung about its cool shadowed lawns and verandahs. Mounting the steps leading to the terrace he found himself confronted by Julian Lestrade the Queensland detective. Paul acknowledged his salute somewhat stiffly; instinct warned him that he was about to be interrogated by an officer of the law.

"I am sorry to trouble you, Mr. Barradas," Lestrade began in a somewhat kindly tone, "but the fact is I have just arrested a friend of your father's. Probably you are familiar with the name of Antoine Chillon?"

Paul was silent, and although there was no trace of passion in his eyes he raged inwardly at the detective's sudden appearance. Delay meant intolerable misfortune now.

"The name is familiar," he answered evasively. "I beg you, however, to state your business with me."

"I should not have interrogated you if I had not sufficient warrant," Lestrade said in his even tones. "I may add that the prisoner, Chillon, has made an important statement in regard to your father, Mr. Barradas. The Queensland Government ar-

rested him on a charge of murdering a trooper up Cooktown way. Several people have identified him already."

"Does the murder charge concern my father?" Paul's lips quivered slightly.

Lestrade shook his head. "The prisoner Chillon does not wish to implicate Doctor Barradas in the affair. He confesses that he was guilty some years ago, in Paris, of bringing about your father's downfall. The papers that sent Doctor Barradas to Nouméa were placed in his safe by Chillon. The prisoner is quite emphatic on this point. And although his confession does not interest the Queensland authorities, the Government, I feel sure, will act in a humane manner. We shall sift Chillon thoroughly before and after his trial; and whatever truth is left in the rascal we are bound to extract it. Of course we expect Doctor Barradas to remain in Queensland until the trial is over."

Paul stammered an almost incoherent reply. He was conscious of the detective's kindly glances, and he realised in that moment the meaning of social democracy in a young land, where the spirit of justice was extended over white men of all nations. He recognised also that Julian Lestrade was a Frenchman whose sympathies were touched by his father's misfortune.

"I thank you," he said simply, "in my father's name."

Lestrade consulted his watch and indicated the house with his cane. "I have a message for Miss Royal; and I fear that it is a gloomy one. One of our troopers came across a party of Madame

Calphurnia's sailors a few hours ago. From what they gather it appears that Madame Royal put out to sea in a kind of coffin-ship. The old lady left the house at daybreak, and the serang belonging to her party declares that she was in a demented condition. It is to be hoped there is no truth in the report," he went on. "These lascars are a pretty unreliable lot."

Raising his hat, the detective passed from the garden into the road, leaving Paul in a state of bewilderment and surprise. Approaching the house, he was met by a servant, who conducted him into Calphurnia's reception-room.

Some minutes later he was conscious of a familiar footfall in the passage, a soft uncertain step accompanied by Aimée's unmistakable voice.

They did not speak for several moments. Paul's heart was too full to find immediate expression in words. Aimée listened attentively while he spoke of his father. And as he continued her eyes became filled with tears. Lestrade's message only deepened the fear in her heart. The empty rooms and deserted apartments seemed to echo the dread thought in her mind.

Yet she felt that she could not ignore Jean's request to examine her immediately. Delay might mean the complete extinction of light for ever. Paul's unbounded confidence in his father's skill as an oculist filled her with hope.

"My father does not think there is a specialist in Queensland capable of treating your case, Aimée. It is not vanity that gives him so much confidence. If you knew the cures he effected in France . . .

the half-blind women and children who often journeyed from Russia and America to consult him! Come, Aimée," he cried fervently. "Let him work while there is light."

Jean met them on the threshold of his boarding-house; and Aimée experienced a thrill of hope at the sound of his voice. Paul held back the news of Chillon's arrest until his father had completed his first examination of Aimée's eyes. During Paul's absence Jean had paid a visit to the shop of a well-known optician, where he had been able to secure many of the necessary instruments of his beloved profession.

To Jean Barradas the science of optics was a divine instinct. In all ages and periods some men stand alone in their craft, seeking no outside help, trusting their own faculties in the mastering of specific ailments. Jean was the great specialist. No earthly power could rob him of his precious gifts. His own naked eye was as true as the most carefully adjusted optimeter.

To the watching Paul each movement of his father became a series of Christ-like attitudes. At times Jean paused as he bent near the beautiful young face; his very touch had become a divine caress. Paul glanced at him once, and the reassuring flash in the physician's eye quieted his palpitating senses.

It was the beginning of day for Aimée, day when strange mists of light penetrated the walls of darkness around her. There were moments when the light mists threatened to fade and vanish for ever, and the horror of the Shade pressed its Ti-

tanic fingers on the young girl's heart. Through those weeks of dread waiting a figure moved beside her, a figure that often stooped in the blinding flash of an X-ray and spoke to her very gently, always gently.

How inconceivable it seemed to her that this quiet physician should always remain so patient, that this father of Paul, who had himself endured the hells of silence and despair, should march with her to the glad light of day!

At one time it seemed as if Jean would have to leave his patient and take his place in the dock beside Antoine Chillon. The trial of the ex-convict took place before Aimée was well on the way to recovery. But when the truth of Jean's iniquitous banishment from France was made apparent by the fear-stricken Chillon, a wave of public sympathy swept over Australia. Those ghastly persecutions which overwhelmed Dreyfus, in France, were not likely to be repeated on an innocent *déporté* in Australia.

From the moment that Chillon's confession was cabled to the French Government all thoughts of Jean's extradition were set aside. Public subscriptions were raised in Sydney and Melbourne to assist him in any legal action that might be brought against him in Brisbane. In the face of such widespread sympathy the Queensland police were not eager to curtail his liberty, although Jean was notified that his presence in the court was necessary.

Antoine Chillon was sentenced to death, and the last penalty of the law was carried out on the morning of Aimée's departure for Barcroft Downs.

Doctor Barradas desired that his patient should sojourn for a year, at least, amid the green nerve-resting spaces of her beautiful station homestead, where the medicinal gum forests and zones of eucalyptus scrub completed her cure.

Jean denied having worked a miracle, but admitted long afterwards that nature had leaped to his assistance at every call. It was evident to Paul and Aimée that he had called where others had tampered in fear and trembling.

Although Jean yearned for his beloved Paris he remained in Australia to witness his son's marriage with Aimée Royal. The ceremony took place within the cathedral where Jean and Chillon had once seen her praying with her blind face to the altar.

After the ceremony Paul and Aimée returned to Calphurnia's late residence by the river, but only for a while. The green spaces of Barcroft Downs beckoned them later. Jean took up his residence in Sydney, where he soon established himself as the leading oculist of the great Southern continent. Patients, wealthy and poor, flocked to him from all parts of Queensland and Victoria. Within an incredibly short period he was in a position to revisit France and his beloved hospital at Boileau where he had achieved so many brilliant successes during the earlier years of his life.

The French Government, though tardy in making amends for their glaring miscarriage of justice, restored to him finally the lost citizenship and positions of honour which he had formerly enjoyed.

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

AN EVENING IN AUSTRALIA

On the western verandah of the house at Barcroft Downs Aimée sat facing the sunset. The child on her lap slumbered peacefully in the bland air of the Australian autumn.

They had returned from Brisbane on the preceding day, after a two years' yachting cruise in all the world's most beautiful waters, and had come at once to the station where Paul had opened his eyes to the Old-New country of the South. The afternoon had been spent in driving to the northern boundary, fourteen miles away, and Paul was now watching the horses feed in the stables. Aimée turned to the western glory a face of happy peace, soft with the touch of Time the Consoler.

Beyond her stretched the slender strip of garden-ground, lovely with chrysanthemums; the wide paddocks where the slip-rails rattled as the released milkers stepped over them; the line of rustling she-oaks that marked the creek; and beyond them, wave upon wave, the sea of gum-trees with crests gently stirring in the sunset breeze. So up past the blue, broken line of hills to the sky, with rank upon rank of clouds dazzling in their vesture of glorious orange and ruby, swimming like transfigured swans in spaces of crimson now fast turning to purple, to azure, to grey.

Aimée knew it all and loved it; for she had been born on the station, and had passed peaceful years there when her mother returned from strange wanderings. She knew all and loved it with the inexpressible love of an Australian for Australia, Land of Poetry, the land whose vast age seems to have gathered and hoarded all the tender grief of the Past, all the sweet melancholy with which humanity —watching the spectacle of birth and life and death, the change of the skies and the passage of the seasons, the continual ebb and flow of existence —invests the universal soul.

No scent in all the world seemed to Aimée quite so sweet as that most intimate and fragrant scent borne by the dawn-wind across tossing leagues of wattle-bloom. No tree in all the world seemed to Aimée quite so beautiful as the eucalypt—that outlaw of the forest, so individual, so free and careless, so thoroughly at ease and content. No bird in all the world seemed to Aimée to sing with the gay, round mellow note of the magpie. No glaring green turf, no flaunting reds of English autumn, could compensate her for the delicate duns and greys, the dull, dreamy olives and ochres, of her own landscape. When far away from Australia, she had longed, longed to return with all the passion of the exile for whom no land can replace his own land, who finds all gains valueless until they are crowned by the joy of home.

Voyaging with her mother in the blue Mediterranean, she had thought of a clearer sapphire where the Barrier reef tames the long Pacific rollers till they come rippling caresses to the white Australian

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"A cruise in all the world's most beautiful waters"

shore. The storied rivers of Europe had not won her from her dream of fern-tangled streams where she had looked through chequered sunlight to watch the platypus dive in a trail of tiny bubbles. All the grandeur of the Alps heaped with snows could not make her forget the low, friendly, familiar Australian hills. Always she had acknowledged other countries good, and held her own land most beloved, best.

When, in her wandering with Paul, she had come to pleasant California, and had inhaled the odour of transplanted Australian trees, her nostalgia for the breadth of the Bush and the breath of the gums became such love-sickness that she had not rested till their course turned homeward. Arrived at Barcroft Downs, she had waited for the first moment when she could slip out into the darkness to touch the trees, inhale the air, and finally fling herself down to embrace the earth, whose mere touch sent her dizzy with delight. Then at last Aimée was fully happy. And now, as she sat and drew the sunset scene into her blood, she felt so wrapped round with beauty that her heart flooded with thankful aspiration.

There was a quick step on the verandah, hushed suddenly as Paul saw his wife and child. He came up gently and caressed her brow. She took his hand in hers and pressed it; her eyes filled with happy tears. The woman's craving for a word of love came to her; she raised her head and spoke:

"So you are not weary of your little wife?"

He knelt and kissed the hem of her gown.